



# ONTARIO HUNGER REPORT 2006

## HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

NOVEMBER 2006



ONTARIO  
ASSOCIATION OF  
FOOD BANKS

[www.OAFB.ca](http://www.OAFB.ca)

## ABOUT THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS (OAFB)

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a network of food banks across the province including 100 communities across Ontario, from Ottawa to Windsor and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls.

The organization has helped serve its members since 1992 and has four major aims to achieve its vision of hunger relief.

**We acquire and distribute food across Ontario.** With the help of our dedicated partners, the OAFB obtains and ships perishable and non-perishable food from our donors to food banks in communities across the province.

**We ensure member food banks meet certain standards of safety, quality and ethics.** Food banks have a responsibility to the communities that they serve. We help member food banks ensure that they can provide safe, high quality and ethical service to their community.

**We offer membership support on development, operations and management.** Although food banks across Ontario come in all shapes and sizes, many face the same challenges of raising funds, directing distribution operations and managing staff and volunteers. We help with the sharing of best practices and offer professional development for our members.

**We educate the public and government on issues of hunger and poverty.** It is difficult to articulate the challenges you face when you are struggling to find a nourishing meal. It is the responsibility of the OAFB to tell the story of food banks and those served by food banks, and educate the public on the issues of hunger and poverty facing Ontarians. These efforts are supported by diligent research and the development of long-term, credible solutions.

The OAFB is not a food bank. It is a non-profit charitable organization, and receives no funding from the United Way or any level of government.

## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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Special thanks to our partners in hunger relief, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB), for their continued work in collecting HungerCount data and producing their annual report on food banks in Canada. This report would not be possible without their diligent efforts.

## KEY FACTS

- **NO. OF ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS PER MONTH:** 330,491 (Highest in the country)
- **PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED WHO ARE CHILDREN:** 40 per cent
- **PROPORTION OF ONTARIANS SERVED WITH A DISABILITY:** 18.2 per cent
- **PROPORTION OF ONTARIANS SERVED WITH JOBS:** 16.9 per cent
- **PRINCIPLE SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THOSE SERVED:** Social assistance (47.2 per cent of those served)
- **MOST COMMON FAMILY TYPES:** Single persons (36.2 per cent) and Single parents (30.9 per cent)
- **NO. OF PERSONS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS AS A PROPORTION OF ONTARIO'S POPULATION:** 2.6 per cent

## OTHER FACTS

- Over 60 per cent of food banks in Ontario have seen an increase in the number of working poor served in the past year.
- The number of Ontarians served by a food bank has declined by 2.4 per cent since 2005, but has increased by 18.6 per cent since 2001.
- 25 per cent of food banks in Ontario reported that their ability to meet the needs of those they serve has declined in the past year.
- One in five food banks in Ontario does not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve.



## INTRODUCTION

The image of hunger for many Canadians is simple. It is a very visible scar on our major cities, striking a small but unfortunate and visible group of citizens forced to the streets and back alleys to plea for food and money. But the actual picture of hunger is much different. It hits more than the 190,000 Canadians who are homeless in our nation's major cities. Hunger is urban and rural. It strikes Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities and working Ontarians. It affects hundreds of thousands, and reaches into our own communities, our own neighbourhoods and our own homes. Hunger lives right next door to all of us.

As food banks, it is our responsibility to educate the public on hunger and poverty in Ontario. This report will attempt to draw a picture of hunger in Ontario by looking at trends in food bank usage, defining

and describing those served in detail, and outlining how food banks are responding to this daily tragedy.

Our efforts would be incomplete if we merely focused on describing the problem that lies before us. We have also done our homework to examine the root causes of hunger in depth so that we may also present reasoned, researched and effective solutions to our representatives. Over the coming weeks and months, we will be bringing our detailed concerns and solutions to all levels of government. If last year was the beginning of a new discussion about hunger in Ontario, we hope that this year is the beginning of a new partnership in hunger relief as we look to engage all Ontarians, including the public and our government representatives, as partners in this endeavour.

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## DATA SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

Food banks are the canary in the coal mine for hunger and poverty in Ontario. They are one of the most accurate gauges that allow us to understand the depth of hunger and poverty and define and describe those individuals and families that are faced with hunger and poverty. We will then be able to develop effective solutions to reduce hunger and poverty in Ontario.

Accordingly, there are three major data sources that are used for this report on hunger. The first is the data collected through the HungerCount survey, which is administered through the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) in partnership with provincial organizations and food banks across the country. The data collected through this survey is primarily quantitative,

and includes valuable information that helps to build a profile of food banks and those they serve. This survey has been administered on a regular basis since 1997, targeting March as the ideal sample month. Ontario's response rate for this survey was 95.7 per cent in 2006.<sup>1</sup>

The second major data source is the annual member survey for the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB). This is a phone survey of member food banks conducted over a two week period in July in order to build a better understanding of the challenges that these organizations face. The response rate for this survey was 83.5 per cent in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

The third major data source includes Statistics Canada datasets. Information on household spending, labour, and income was collect-

ed and analyzed to provide a better picture of the challenges faced by Ontarians. This data was compiled through regular reports produced by Statistics Canada as well as the most recent census.

In many cases, this report utilizes the low income cutoff (LICO) measure established by Statistics Canada. LICO is the point where the portion of income spent on food, clothing and shelter is 20 per-

centage points more than average.<sup>3</sup> According to Statistics Canada, this would mean that currently, any family spending more than 63 per cent of their income on food, shelter, clothing and other necessities would be living below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Although it is not an exact measure, it is felt that it will also help to illustrate the trends highlighted in this report.

## HUNGER IN ONTARIO: AN OVERVIEW

**330,491 Ontarians were served by food banks each month in 2006.**

Despite our continued prosperity, hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens are served by food banks in our province. 330,491 Ontarians were served by food banks each month in 2006. This represents a small decline over last year of 2.4 per cent. It is hoped that this decline continues, but it is only a short term phenomenon.

The five year trend shows that food bank usage is still on the rise in our province. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of Ontarians served by food banks increased by 18.6 per cent. This disturbing trend can be seen in graph one. The rate of change is well beyond the overall increases in our province's population, as this five year rate of increase

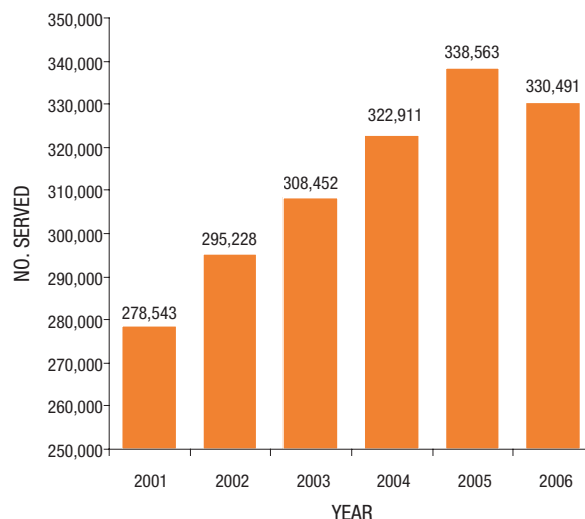
is almost twice the rate of population growth in Ontario.<sup>5,6</sup>

Hunger is not just limited to the space within our province's borders. Unfortunately, it is a persistent phenomenon in Canada: over 750,000 Canadians were served by food banks in 2006.<sup>7</sup> In the past year, the number of Canadians served by food banks declined by 8.5 per cent.<sup>8</sup> But the five year trend still shows an increase. Since 2001, food bank usage in Canada has increased by 4.8 per cent.<sup>9</sup>

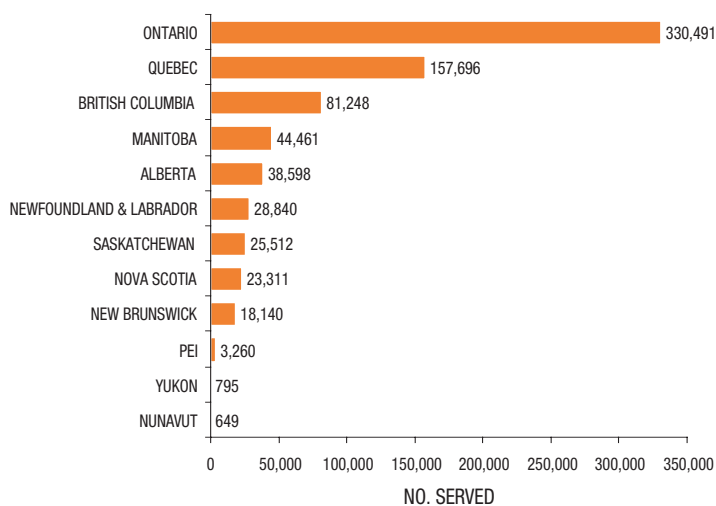
When compared to our neighbours, we can see that the number of citizens served by food banks far outnumbers other Canadian provinces. As graph two illustrates, Ontario is approaching the unenviable

**The number of people served by food banks in Ontario has increased by 18.6 per cent since 2001.**

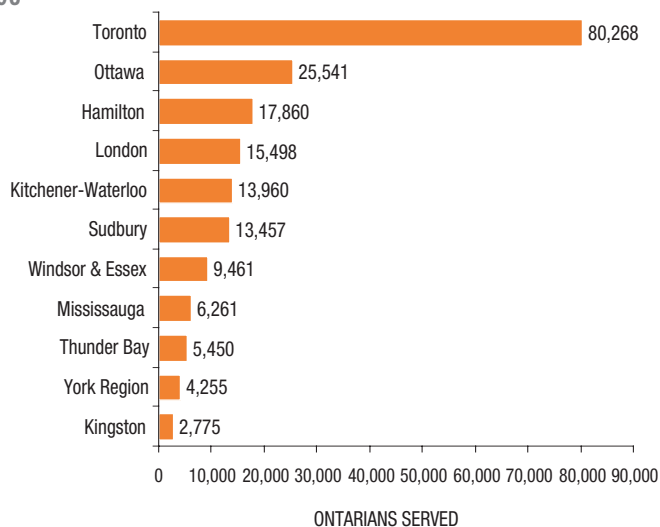
Graph One: Ontarians Served By Food Banks Every Month, 2001 to 2006



Graph Two: Canadians Served by Food Banks Each Month by Province, 2006<sup>10</sup>



Graph Three: Ontarians Served By Food Banks Every Month in Selected Major Centres in Ontario, 2006<sup>13</sup>



position of representing the majority of those served by food banks in Canada, with 43.9 per cent of the total population served across the country each month living in our province.

**Geography of Hunger in Ontario.** Hunger hits families across Ontario, from the stunning shores of Lake Superior in Northwestern Ontario to the suburbs and centres of the Ottawa Valley. There is a food bank in nearly every village, town, city and major urban centre in our province because hunger and poverty and those who commit themselves to fighting it are everywhere.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of Ontarians served by food banks live in our major centres. Food banks

in Toronto serve the greatest number of Ontarians by far. According to the Daily Bread Food Bank's Who's Hungry survey, 894,017 persons living in the Greater Toronto Area were served by food banks in 2006.<sup>11</sup> Over 80,000 Torontonians are served by food banks every month.<sup>12</sup>

Many other communities serve a very large number of their citizens. Over 10,000 Ontarians are served by food banks in each of Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Sudbury.

But hunger is not just an urban problem. Tens of thousands of Ontarians are served by hard working volunteers in food banks in rural centres, small towns, and farming communities across Ontario. It is

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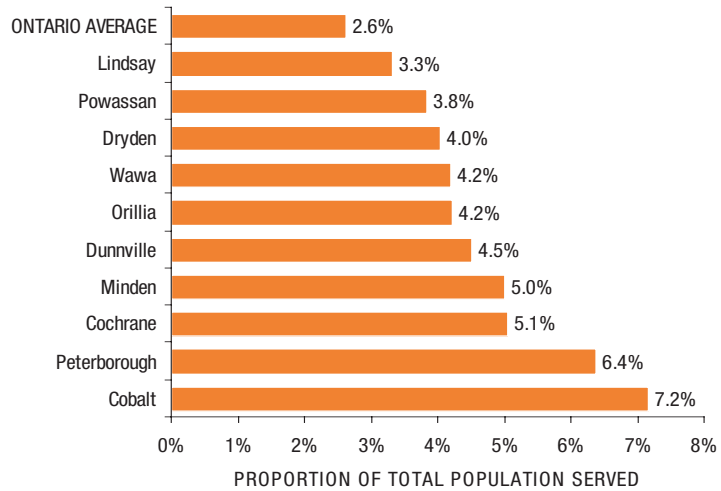
In some rural communities, the rate of hunger is three times greater than the provincial average.

estimated that over 60,000 Ontarians are served by food banks in communities with populations of less than 75,000 persons.<sup>14</sup>

Although the absolute numbers in smaller centres may be lower than the totals in Ontario's major cities like Toronto, Hamilton or Ottawa, the prevalence of hunger may

be just as great or greater in rural Ontario. In some rural communities, the rate of hunger is three times greater than the provincial average. This can be seen when comparing the community population to the number of citizens served by the local food bank, and is illustrated in graph four.

Graph Four: Proportion of Population Served by Food Banks in Selected Rural Communities in Ontario, 2006<sup>15</sup>



## IN FOCUS: COBALT, ONTARIO

**Population:** 1,229  
**No. Served by Food Bank:** 88  
**Proportion of Population Served:** 7.2 per cent

Cobalt is a small town three hours outside of Sudbury, in North-eastern Ontario's beautiful Timiskaming District. Once named Ontario's Most Historic Town by TV Ontario's Studio2, Cobalt was a mining community that was once one of the largest silver producing areas in the world.

At one point in the first part of the last century, it produced over 30,000,000 ounces of silver per year.<sup>16</sup> But by the 1950s, production began to slowly decline, and today mining has all but disappeared. The mines left a significant environmental legacy, with millions of tonnes of waste rock and tailings laced with arsenic. Chemicals pose a tremendous hazard to the local population.

The closing of the mines also left another legacy for residents in this part of the province. There are no major employers in town, and many residents struggle to make ends meet.

A tour of the town reveals a number of dilapidated homes, crumbling infrastructure and abandoned buildings. The unemployment rate is over twice the provincial average.<sup>18</sup> Average household incomes are only 61.6 per cent of the provincial average.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, many Cobalt residents have been forced to use their local food bank, or find their way to one of the other food banks in the area. The rate of food bank usage in town is three times the provincial average.

**A tour of Cobalt reveals a number of dilapidated homes, crumbling infrastructure and abandoned buildings. The rate of food bank usage in town is three times the provincial average.**



## WHO IS HUNGRY?

Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities and working Ontarians are hardest hit by hunger.

It is easy to get lost in high level statistics and figures when examining hunger solely at a national or provincial level. The numbers are staggering, but there is much more beyond the simple statistics that outline the absolute numbers of who was served.

In order to understand hunger and poverty so that we may address its root causes, we must look well beyond. It is a disquieting prospect, but we must affix our gaze on the individual faces of hunger. We will attempt to focus our efforts so that we can see a clearer picture of who is hungry by examining household characteristics as well as trends in the population that is served by food banks in Ontario.

### **Household characteristics.**

There are a number of ways to define and describe households that are served by food banks in Ontario, including family type and household income. The majority of those households served are families. 63.8 per cent of all households served are single parent or two-parent families.<sup>20</sup> Other household types include a large number of single Ontarians (36.2 per cent), and a smaller proportion of students (5.4 per cent) and seniors (6.9 per cent).<sup>21</sup>

The sources of income are as diverse as the household types. Many Ontarians who are served by food banks receive social assistance. 47.2 per cent of Ontarians served by food banks report that Ontario Works (OW) is their primary source of income.<sup>22</sup> This represents a significant decline from 2003, when 62 per cent of those served in Ontario reported that social assistance was their primary source of income.<sup>23</sup>

The income dynamic is certainly changing, as many more Ontarians who are served by food banks are relying on employment and disabil-

ity support as their primary source of income.

**A Troubling Trend.** A troubling trend is emerging in our province. Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities and working Ontarians are hardest hit by hunger. These three groups represent the vast majority of those served by food banks in Ontario: Ontario's children (40 per cent); Ontarians with disabilities (18.2 per cent); and working Ontarians (16.9 per cent).

**Ontario's Children.** Ontario's children are hardest hit by hunger and poverty. Over 40 per cent of those served by food banks in Ontario are children, meaning that well over one hundred thousand children must turn to food banks every month.

This is arguably the result of a number of factors, including our child poverty rate and the benefits we provide to support Ontario's children. In Ontario, the child poverty rate has risen by almost five per cent since 1989.<sup>24</sup> Today, 16.1 per cent of Ontario's children are below the poverty line.<sup>25</sup> We are also well behind other developed countries. According to the results of UNICEF's 2005 global survey of child poverty rates, Canada ranks 19th out of 26 industrialized nations in terms of child poverty.<sup>26</sup>

The response of our provincial and federal governments on this front has been far from adequate. The level of benefits provided is insufficient for many children to even approach any established poverty measure, and there are continuing challenges with the interaction and lack of integration of provincial and federal child benefits.

**Ontarians with Disabilities.** Tens of thousands of Ontarians with disabilities also face the spectre of hunger on a daily basis. Almost 20 per cent of those served by

**A TROUBLING TREND:****HUNGER HITS ONTARIO'S CHILDREN, ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES AND WORKING ONTARIANS THE HARDEST**

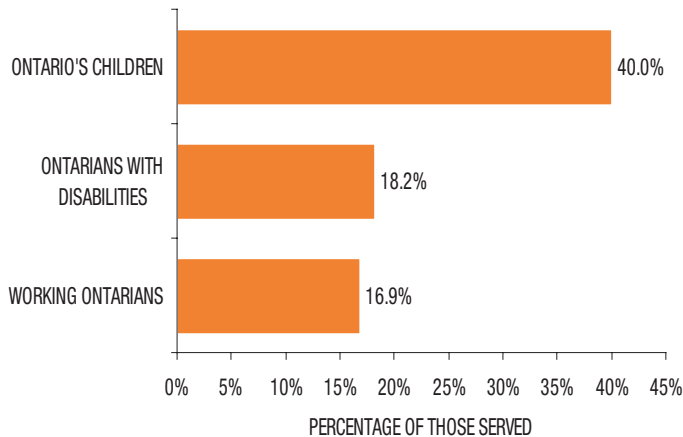
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This is particularly striking as these figures are in opposition to the public image of hunger and

poverty. They also represent a segment of our society that we believe is protected and supported by our social safety net or by their own hard work.

In order to respond to this troubling trend, the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) will be releasing three research papers at the end of 2006 looking at these three groups in more detail and offering recommendations to both the provincial and federal governments to address this problem.

Graph: Selected Population Groups as a Total Proportion of Those Served by Food Banks in Ontario, 2006



Over 60 per cent of food banks have seen an increase in the number of working poor that they serve.

food banks in this province are Ontarians with disabilities. This figure is well beyond the population average of 13.5 per cent.<sup>27</sup>

Many Ontarians struggle to make ends meet because of the inadequacies of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The application and review process is complex and confusing, forcing many to opt out altogether. The level of support is also insufficient. For example, a single person living on ODSP living in a major Ontario city is below many significant measures of poverty, including Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off (LICO), as well as the Market Basket Measures (MBM).<sup>28</sup>

**Working Ontarians.** The number of working Ontarians served by food banks has increased again this year, increasing from 14.5 per cent in 2005 to 16.9 per cent of those served in 2006. Over 60 per cent of food banks have seen an increase in the number of working Ontarians that they serve.<sup>29</sup> This troubling trend can be seen in graph five.

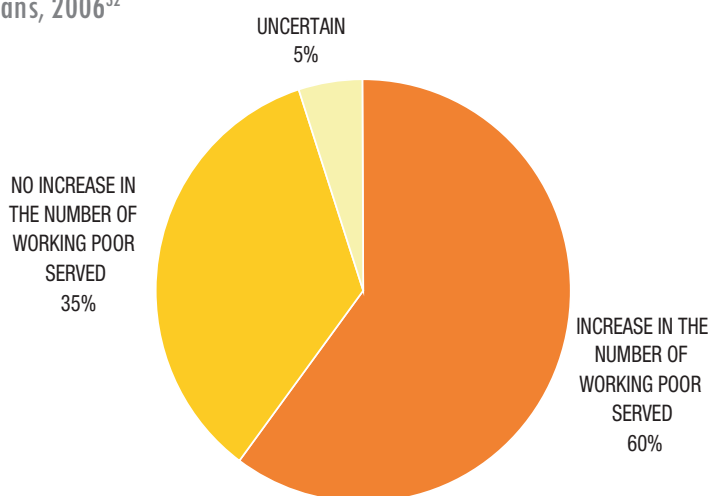
As with child poverty, this is undoubtedly the result of a number of factors. There is a significant and

growing number of working Ontarians that live below the poverty line. It is estimated that there are over half a million working Ontarians living in poverty, and this figure is growing over the short and long-term.<sup>30,31</sup> There are also far fewer protections and income supports for working Ontarians compared to other provinces, states and nations.

The above analysis of the root causes of hunger and poverty for Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities, and working Ontarians is quite simple. There is much more work that needs to be done to ensure we can effectively examine all the root causes, existing support structures and potential impacts of hunger and poverty for our most vulnerable.

In order to support this aim, the Ontario Association of Food Banks will release three discussion papers examining these three groups in more detail and offer recommendations to government the lives of our fellow citizens can be effectively improved. Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities and working Ontarians are hungry for change. We hope to lay the foundation for that change.

Graph Five: Proportion of Food Banks Experiencing an Increase in the Number of Working Ontarians, 2006<sup>32</sup>



## OUR RESPONSE: FOOD BANK TRENDS

Food banks will not accept the ultimate responsibility for the health, well-being and success of all Ontarians. This is a collective responsibility that is shared between our federal, provincial and municipal governments. However, food banks do *respond* collectively to the changing figures and faces of hunger and poverty in Ontario.

A sense of moral outrage at the inability of any of our fellow citizens to have enough food for themselves or their family evokes the will to act immediately. But this immediate emotion is tempered, as their ability to respond is influenced by the changes above. There are a number of striking trends that can be seen in the ability of food banks to meet local needs as well as the food supply of food banks across the province.

**Ability to meet local needs.** The ability of food banks to meet the local needs of their community is impacted by the challenge of rising demand, food industry changes, and their ability to maintain the rising costs of their own operations. One can see the result of these trends when examining the perceptions

of food banks regarding supply, as well as the amount of food provided in each food hamper.

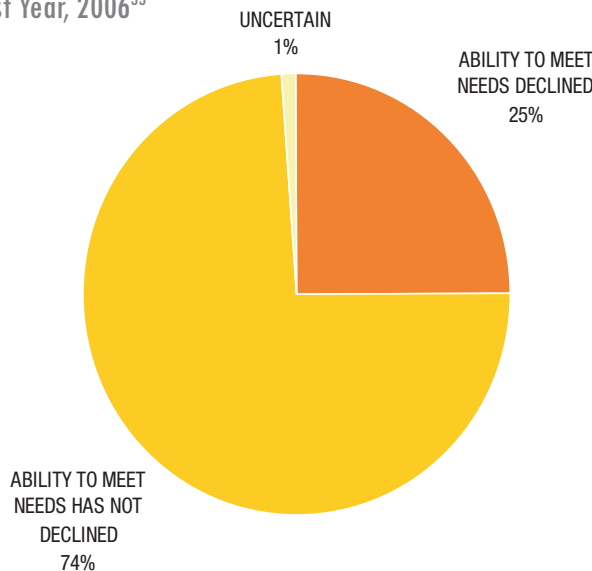
In general, food banks continue to struggle to meet the needs of those they serve in their own communities. This should be an unsurprising phenomenon, as many food banks are run solely by volunteers, receive no provincial or federal government funding, and rely on uncertain levels of food and financial resources from their own community and beyond. It is a testament to their strong will that they are able to carry out their work with such limited and uncertain resources, and touch hundreds of thousands of lives in the process.

Unfortunately, over 25 per cent of food banks in Ontario saw their ability to meet the needs of those they served in the past year decline. This trend can be seen in graph six. A number of food banks closed or were at severe risk of closing in 2006, including agencies in communities such as Wasaga Beach, Paris and Minden.

This was certainly not for lack of effort on the part of the hard working men and women that dedicate

...many food banks are run solely by volunteers, receive no provincial or federal government funding, and rely on uncertain levels of food and financial resources from their own community and beyond.

Graph Six: Change in the Ability of Ontario's Food Banks to Meet the Needs of Their Clients over the Past Year, 2006<sup>33</sup>



The food supply of many food banks in Ontario simply cannot keep up with demand.

every available effort to serve their communities. The demand is simply so great that it has overwhelmed both the generosity of many communities and the hearts of those who have committed to serve those in need.

Fortunately, it would seem that their ability to meet their community's need is improving slightly. In 2005, almost 28 per cent of food banks in Ontario reported that their ability to meet the needs of their clients had declined.<sup>34</sup> This has decreased by three per cent in 2006.

Food banks in Ontario also continue to be a source of emergency food for Ontarians. They do not have the ability, and cannot, provide for the full nutritional requirements of those they serve. Two-thirds of food banks in Ontario provide five days or less of food per month for each individual served. This can be seen in graph seven. But these are certainly not strict limits. In many cases, food banks stretch their resources much beyond five days to provide additional food to individuals who are in dire need.

**Food Supply.** The overall food supply that moves through the network of food banks in Ontario is vast. Food banks in Ontario distribute millions of pounds of food

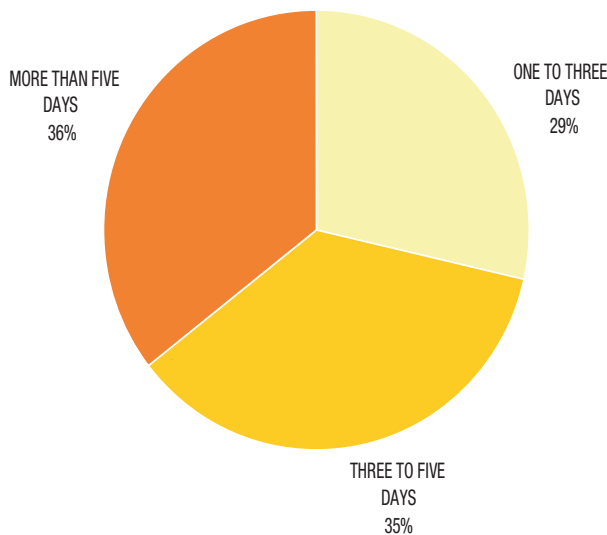
through hamper, shelter and kitchen programmes every month. But this food supply is changing greatly as demand continues to rise. One can examine these changes to food supply in Ontario when looking at whether it meets demand, its geographic source and food purchases.

The food supply of many food banks in Ontario simply cannot keep up with demand. They struggle to provide the already limited emergency food that hungry Ontarians need to make it through the month. In 2006, one in five food banks did not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients. This trend can be clearly seen in graph eight.

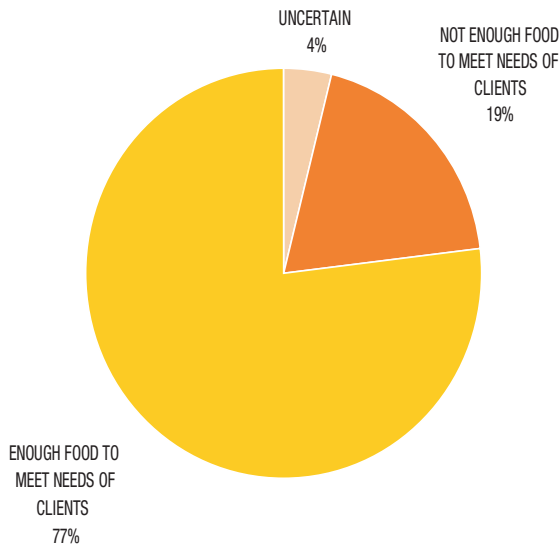
As with the ability to meet the needs of those they serve, the proportion of food banks that have enough food to meet the needs of their clients has also increased slightly. 19 per cent of food banks in Ontario did not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients in 2006, compared to 24 per cent in 2005.<sup>37</sup>

The source of the food supply at local food banks is also changing dramatically. The capacity of a community to meet local needs is diminishing. The local food bank can no longer rely solely on the generosity

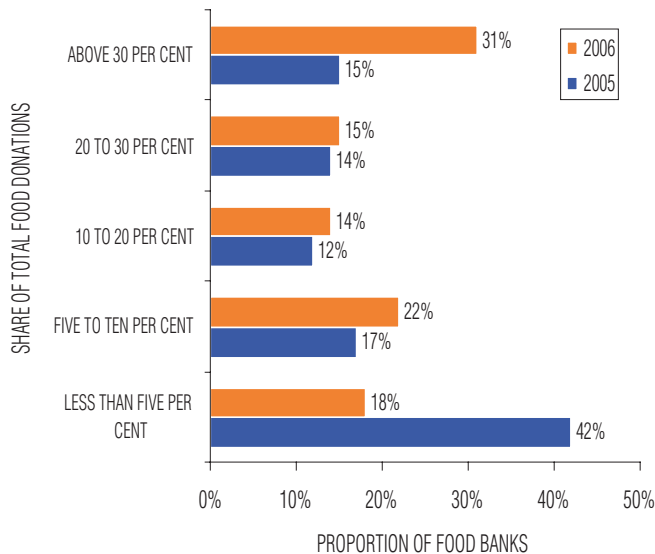
Graph Seven: Amount of Food Provided Per Hamper for Food Banks in Ontario, 2006<sup>35</sup>



Graph Eight: Supply of Food at Food Banks in Ontario in Relation to Demand, 2006<sup>36</sup>



Graph Nine: Proportion of Food Donations Received by Food Banks in Ontario from Outside the Community, 2005 to 2006<sup>39</sup>



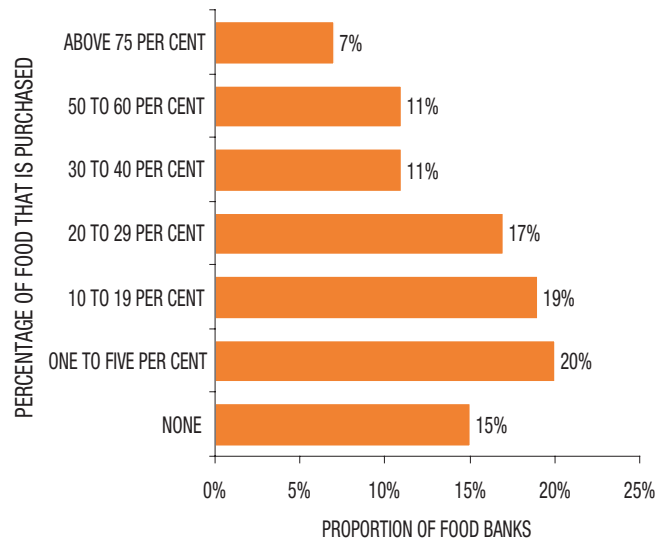
of community neighbours and partners to meet growing demand. The proportion of food donations from outside of the community received by food banks in Ontario has increased tremendously over the past year. In 2006, 31 per cent of food banks in Ontario received greater than 30 per cent of their food donations from outside of their community. This is double the figure from 2005, and the trend can be seen in graph nine.

Despite the tremendous generosity of their neighbours and partners outside of their community, many food banks must also purchase a

great deal of their food in order to meet their local need. Demand is so great that almost one in five food banks in Ontario purchased more than fifty per cent of the food they distribute to those they serve in their community in 2006.<sup>40</sup> For some food banks, this can mean that they have to spend tens of thousands of dollars every year to ensure that their shelves are full.

But not every food bank must purchase a significant amount of food. 35 per cent of food banks in Ontario purchase five per cent or less of their food. These figures can be seen in graph ten.

Graph Ten: Percentage of Food That Is Purchased by Food Banks in Ontario, 2006<sup>41</sup>



## CONCLUSION

Ontario is the most prosperous province in one of the most successful nations on earth. But not all Ontarians share in this good fortune. Over 330,000 Ontarians are served by food banks every month; a figure that has risen by almost 20 per cent in the past five years. It is a striking characteristic of all communities, from our smallest towns to our largest centres.

Food banks struggle to keep up with the growing demand. Their ability to meet local needs is declining and they may not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve. It is also striking that communities are no longer able to provide enough for their food bank through local donations and solicitation. Many food banks must respond to this growing demand by purchasing an increasing amount of food and gleaning supplies from outside of their community.

We have seen some changes, as our provincial government is beginning to respond to the issues that we have ignored for almost a generation. There are a growing number of vocal advocates within government, more detailed studies and reviews, and incremental changes to our income support systems. But we cannot take small steps when giant strides are required.

We are witnessing a troubling trend: Ontario's children, Ontarians with disabilities and working Ontarians are hit hardest by hunger. And they are hungry for change.

Ontario's children are hungry for change. Over 40 per cent of those

we serve are children, and as many as one in six children in our province live in poverty. We have the means and programs to provide, but choose instead to risk the future of our youngest citizens.

Ontarians with disabilities are hungry for change. The current system of financial support is inadequate with restrictive qualifications and a difficult application process. As a result, many struggle to live well below the poverty line.

Hard-working Ontarians are hungry for change. There are over half a million Ontarians that count themselves amongst the ranks of the working poor, living below the poverty line despite working full-time. They find themselves in working conditions with low-pay, limited security and little or no benefits.

All Ontarians are hungry for change. And as the common expression of our collective conscience, major newspapers in communities including Hamilton, London and Toronto have devoted a lot of pulp and ink to highlight a growing problem of hunger and poverty in our midst and to strongly advocate for change.

Over the coming weeks and months, the Ontario Association of Food Banks will be pressing our representatives for change for many of those we serve. A new discussion on hunger and poverty began last year. It is hoped that this year will be the beginning of a new partnership in hunger relief. We hope you will join us at the table.

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“My major problem with the world is a problem of scarcity in the midst of plenty...of people starving while there are unused resources...people having skills which are not being used.”

**MILTON FRIEDMAN**



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