

Food Security Project – Quesnel & Area

Kirsten Balaski, Community Food Coordinator, Canadian Mental Health Quesnel

Food security defined by this project:

Food security is having reliable access to enough safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food. It goes beyond just having access to food to having healthy food that's fitting for your culture as well.

Project

Kristen Balaski is currently halfway through a three-year contract as the Community Food Security Coordinator at the Quesnel Office of Canadian Mental Health. She has completed the first step of the project, assessing and mapping to identify community needs, accessing community resources, gaps and barriers to resources and community partners.

Findings

- In Northern BC, approximately 1 in 5 households are deemed to be food insecure; that is, one in five households do not have consistent and dependable access to a safe, nutritious, and diverse food supply.
- The average monthly cost of nutritious food for a family of four in the Northern BC Region was \$1038 in 2017 and a family of four receives up to \$1,301 in income assistance per month. This leaves \$263 to cover shelter, transportation, clothing, school supplies

Barriers

- Transportation: Grocery stores that are more affordable are located in South Quesnel, while the majority of lower income individuals/families reside in West Quesnel
- Psychological State: Anxiety, lowered motivation, and mental health struggles prevent people from accessing food or interfere with the process
- Dietary Restrictions: Charitable food supports rely largely on donated easily preserved foods, which can be difficult for those with diabetes, high blood pressure and other special dietary concerns
- Stigma: Many individuals who are food insecure do not access food supports.
- Accessibility:
 - Lack of food skills
 - Complicated/limiting referral processes
 - Lack of knowledge of services
 - Those who are employed but food insecure often do not access services
- Limitations of Current Services:
 - Lack of low-cost/affordable food options
 - Programming reliant on donations or grants
 - Large scale food waste donations available but programming doesn't have capacity to process these
 - Parameters of existing food rescue programs (ex. food mesh) pose challenges

What community partners need

- Stable funding
- Increased collaboration between programs

- Access to an appropriate vehicle to pickup and distribute food donations
- Refrigeration/Freezer storage space for large scale fresh food donations
- More people power to organize, sort, and distribute food donations

What people would like

- Access to affordable fresh foods, particularly produce and meat
- Food skills
- Charitable food options that meet dietary needs (such as diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.)
- Community programming around shared cooking, skill building, and gardening

Ideas for the Future

- A community food center that allows for drop-in services, peer-led programming, food skills workshops, and community gardening
- A centralized food rescue distribution system to support current resources
- Customized food options, such as a market-style food bank where individuals may choose items themselves and/or more frequent hampers of fewer items for those without kitchen facilities
- A low-cost/affordable food market or good food box program

Call to Action

The following is a list of actions the City of Quesnel and other community partners can take to support the project.

- Advocate for universal basic income and poverty reduction of citizens
- Share knowledge related to food insecurity, dispelling myths and broadening perspectives
- Create letters of support for food security projects and initiatives
- in kind commitment to projects, such as
 - Renewed lease of office space to Canadian Medical Health Association for support of food coordination project.
 - Collaboration between Regional Food Hub and food support programming. (Examples include use of truck rental or food processing services; space sharing for food storage)
 - Coordination and facilitation of the ongoing food security meetings in Quesnel, possibly transforming this into a Food Policy Council.

Resources

[Food Security in Quesnel, Council Report by Kirsten Balaski, Community Food Coordinator, Canadian Mental Health, January 19, 2021](#)

[City of Quesnel, Council Highlights, January 21, 2021](#)

[Food insecurity is a big problem in Quesnel, My Cariboo Now, January 20, 2021](#)

[New mental health, food security programs being offers in Quesnel, Quesnel Cariboo Observer, October 11, 2019](#)