



Rethinking Food Charity: A Community Conversation Service User or Potential User Survey Results



About this Survey

This survey was the start of an 8-month project to talk about and scope out the future of emergency food services in Newfoundland and Labrador. To better understand the current landscape and whether service users feel emergency food programs work for them, we asked people who use these emergency food services, or who could use them but choose not to. We received a total of 495 responses from folks across the province. The purpose of this survey analysis is to help us identify the most valuable topics for the rest of this process in rethinking food charity. Over the next 8 months, we are getting people together online and in person to think about how this system works, how it could be better, and what would need to change in the world so it wasn't needed at all.

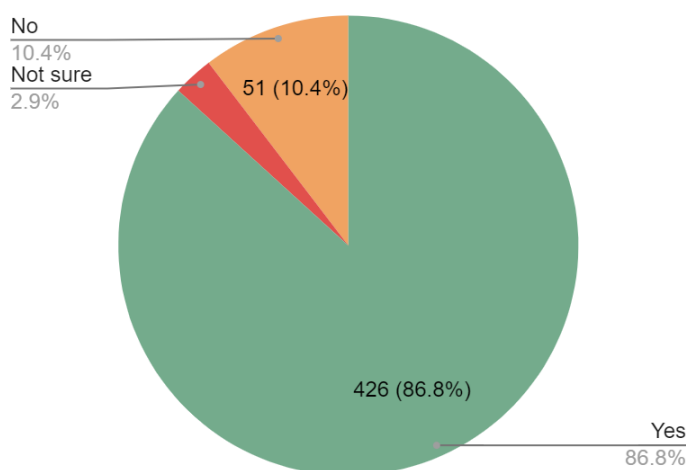
Summary: What We Heard from Service Users

- ❖ Almost 90% of survey respondents have, at some point in their lives, had trouble getting enough good food to eat, struggled to get groceries, or worried about where their next meal was going to come from.
- ❖ Over 80% of respondents have gotten help with food from a community program, such as a food bank, community meal, or community snack program.
- ❖ Food banks are the most frequently used community food programs by service users.
- ❖ Many people who choose not to use food programs do so because of the stigmatization that goes along with it.
- ❖ Nearly 75% of respondents access a community or emergency food program at least once per month.
- ❖ Almost 70% of service users felt that the food programs they use could be doing more to help.
- ❖ Most service users strongly agreed that the people at food programs do not judge them and they feel welcomed when they reach out for help.
- ❖ Most service users felt that the most unsatisfactory part of accessing food programs is the amount and variety of food they receive for themselves and their families.
- ❖ Service users had much to tell the service providers who run the food programs, including “Thank you”, “Be kind and don’t judge”, and “Improve the amount and quality of the food you provide”.
- ❖ More than 50% of service users felt that they would need an income-related solution in order to stop using community or emergency food programs.

First, we asked respondents about their use of food programs or emergency food programs.

Have you and/or your family ever had trouble getting enough good food to eat, struggled to get groceries, or worried about where your next meal is going to come from?

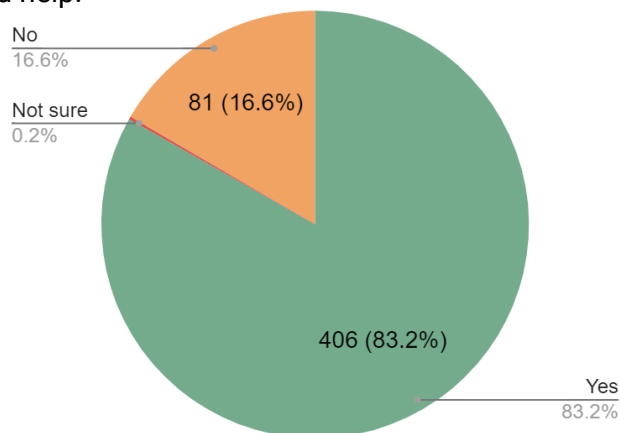
The vast majority of respondents indicated that at some point during their lives, they have had trouble getting enough good food to eat, struggled to get groceries, or worried about where their next meal would come from. Only 10% of respondents stated that they had never experienced any of these circumstances, and less than 5% were unsure.



Have you ever gotten help with food from a community program (e.g., food bank, community meal, snack program, etc.)?

Similarly, over 80% of respondents reported that they have used a community program to help with food, and less than 20% have never gotten help with food from a community program.

In the previous question, 51 individuals reported they have never had trouble getting enough good food to eat, struggled to get groceries, or worried about their next meal. In turn, one would expect the same number of respondents to report they have never gotten help with food from a community program. Hence, the additional 'No' responses to this question may represent a rough estimate of the number of individuals who are experiencing some form of food insecurity, but have not accessed help.



If you have never gotten help from a community program, why not?

Below are some quotes from participants who could have used community food services, but didn't.

"I try to stock up on specials."

"I was never offered help."

"I'm not allowed to go."

"I do not qualify for help."

"Without transportation, it's hard to get there."

"I am unsure of the services available to me."

"I always worry about others who may need the help more than me."

"I didn't think I qualified for services because I have a job."

"I am a private person, and it is embarrassing and stigmatizing to ask for help"

"I am fortunate enough to have family and friends who help me."

"The nearest foodbank is 50km away."

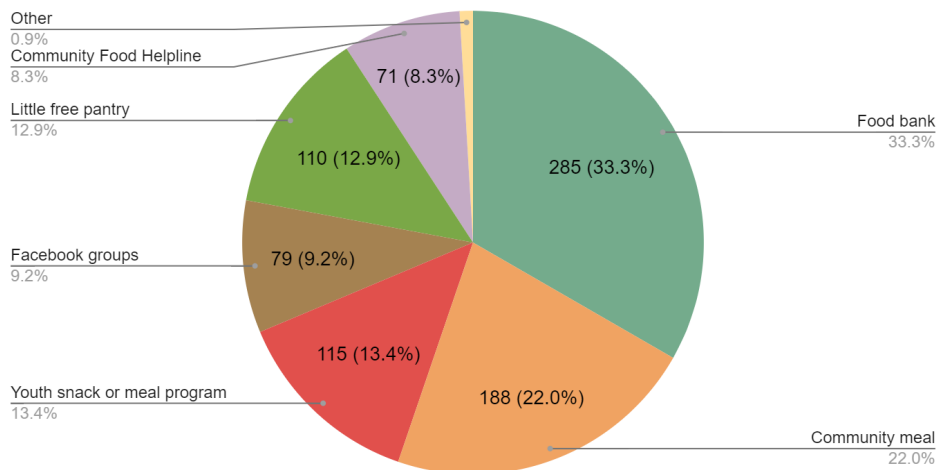
"I worry about judgment, gossip, and drama."

"I want to leave what little the food banks offer for families and children with no food."

"Because of my pride. Instead, I trade labour for food."

If you have gotten help with food from a community program, which services have you used?

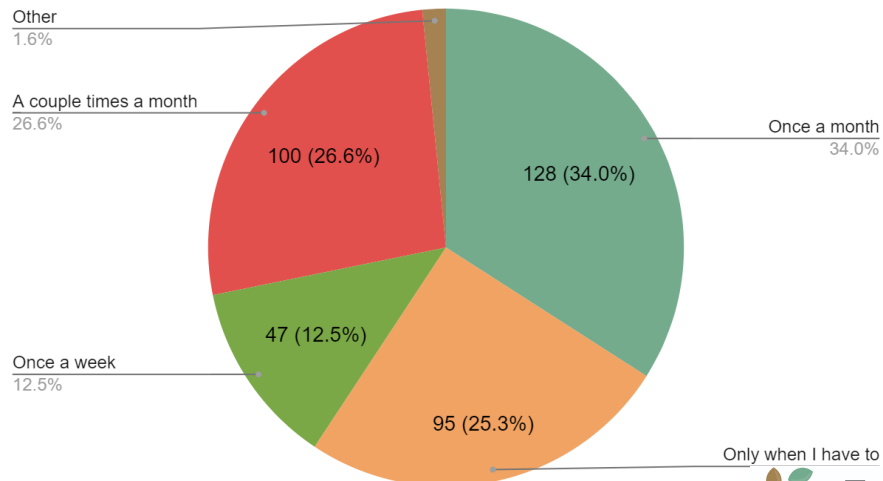
Of the 406 respondents who have accessed help from a community food program, exactly one-third reported using a food bank. More than 20% reported using a community meal program, and slightly less than 15% reported using a youth meal or snack program. Some respondents also indicated having used a little free pantry, facebook group(s), as well as the Community Food Helpline to get help with food. Of those who selected 'Other', respondents talked about getting help from First Nation food programs or from friends and family members.



*respondents were able to choose more than one

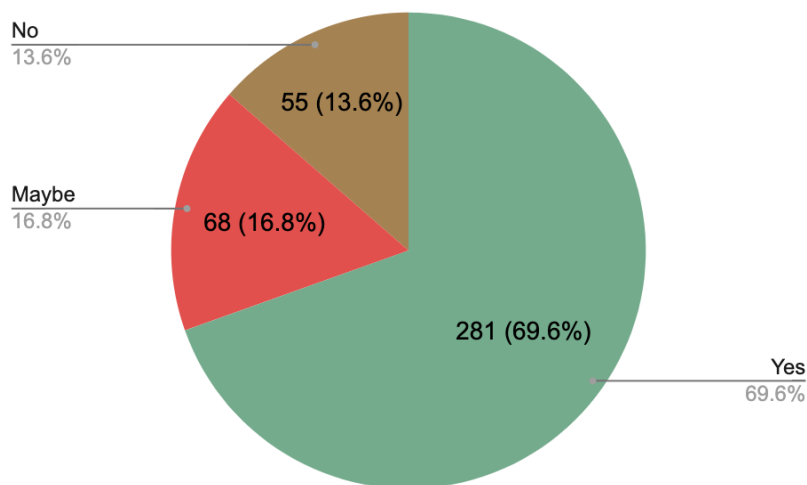
When you've used these programs, how often do you usually go?

Majority of service users access community food programs once per month. Over 25% of respondents report using food programs a couple of times per month, and slightly less indicate they only use them when they have to. Just over 10% report using community programs to help with food once a week. Combined, nearly 75% of service users access community food programs at least once per month. Of those who selected 'Other', 50% said they access certain outreach and meal programs daily, and others noted accessing food programs as often as they can.



Do you think that the programs you use could do more to help?

Almost 70% of all service users who answered this question felt that community programs could be doing more to help. In turn, less than one-third thought that the programs they use could not do more, or could maybe do more to help.



Next, we wanted to get a sense of service users' experiences when they access these programs.

Service users responded to several statements to indicate what their experiences have been like when using food programs or emergency food programs. A scale from 1 - 10 (1 = Strongly disagree; 10 = Strongly agree) was used, and 'N/A' was selected if they felt the statement did not apply to their experience.

a. I feel welcomed when I reach out for help

Average = **7.24**

Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree					
N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0.8%	2%	4%	1%	5%	14%	9%	12.8%	17.3%	5.5%	29%

b. The people at the food programs don't judge me

Average = **7.63**

Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree					
N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

1.5%	1.3%	1.5%	3.8%	4%	11.6%	7.3%	11.1%	16.6%	10.3%	32.9%
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c. The food I receive is enough for me/my family to get by

Average = **5.90**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8.6%	5.9%	6.7%	9.6%	4%	20.1%	12.8%	11.8%	9.9%	3.7%	15.5%

d. The food programs provide a good variety of different foods

Average = **5.82**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5.2%	5.7%	7.5%	9.1%	8.1%	13.3%	16.4%	14.3%	8.3%	4.9%	12.8%

e. The hours and location of food programs work for me/my family

Average = **6.23**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3.2%	5.1%	5.3%	8.2%	6.6%	19.9%	9.3%	14.9%	11.2%	6.9%	17.8%

f. When other things are going on in my life, the people at food programs can connect me with help

Average = **6.40**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7.4%	4.8%	4.3%	6.4%	7.2%	15.2%	11.2%	14.1%	12.8%	7.4%	16.8%

g. When there are changes to food programs I use, they (organization, staff, etc.) let me know.

Average = 6.30

Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree					
N/A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11.2%	7.7%	5.2%	3.8%	6.6%	16.7%	13.7%	9%	11.2%	6.8%	19.7%

Overall, the majority of service users strongly agreed that:

- They feel welcomed when they reach out for help,
- The people at food programs don't judge them,

On the other hand, most service users only somewhat agreed that:

- The food they receive from food programs is enough for themselves and their families to get by,
- The food programs provide a good variety of different foods, and
- The hours and locations of food programs work for them and their families.
- The people at food programs can connect them with help when there are other things going on in their life, and
- The people at food programs let them know about changes to the programs they use.

Based on the responses in this section, the least satisfactory part of accessing these programs are the limited resources and infrastructure the service providers are currently working with.

Finally, we asked some open-ended questions about people’s experiences and what they’d like to see moving forward.

Is there anything you would like to tell the service providers who run the food programs you use?

Responses to this question were themed and are presented below. Primarily, service users want to tell service providers to be kind, not judge their clients, and reduce the stigmatization of accessing community food services. Exactly one quarter of respondents mentioned that they would like service providers to improve the quality of the food they offer, as well as to increase the amount and choice of food available to clients. Many service users just wanted to say “Thank you” to the people who run their food programs, and others wanted to tell them that their system needs improvement, such as their operation, hours, and ability to respond to specific food requests. Respondents falling into the ‘Other’ category wanted to tell service providers one or more of the following things:

- Delivery should be offered for clients without transportation who are not within walking distance,
- Food vouchers should be an option so that clients can go to the store and purchase the food they want,
- Service providers need to attend to and maintain the hygiene of the food service environment, and
- Service users need more than just food.

Response Themes	
Be kind, don’t judge, and reduce stigma	92 (38.3%)
Improve the quantity, quality, and choice of food	60 (25%)
Thank you, you’re doing a good job	42 (17.5%)
Improve the system	22 (9.2%)
Nothing	12 (5%)
Other	12 (5%)

What would you need in order to move away from (or stop using) the food programs you use, if you wanted?

Responses to this question were themed and are presented below. In order to stop using community food programs, over 50% of service users mentioned solutions related to income. These included:

- Implementing a Universal Basic Income program
- Increasing minimum wage
- Implementing a living wage
- Increasing or implementing government subsidies (federal or provincial)

The next most frequent response was related to job stability, such as better employment opportunities. People also felt that lower and more reasonable food prices could help them to stop relying on food programs. Others mentioned more affordable housing and transportation costs, and a few talked about improved healthcare so they can regain their health and go back to work. Some also spoke about how they could move away from using food programs if the food programs they used provided higher quality, more nutritious food. Less than 10% of service users said they did not know what they would need to stop using food programs, and of those who fell into the ‘Other’ category, respondents indicated they would need:

- An equal share of resources and opportunities,
- Enough food to live,
- Money, education, and a good job,
- Lower fuel prices, and
- Help with other things going on in their lives.

Response Themes	
Income supports (UBI, living wage, etc.)	191 (55.8%)
Job stability	55 (16.1%)
Better food prices	28 (8.2%)
Affordable housing	10 (2.9%)
Better quality food at food programs	8 (2.3%)
Affordable transportation	6 (1.8%)
Better healthcare	3 (0.9%)
Don't know	28 (8.2%)
Other	13 (3.8%)

Finally, is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

Below are some quotes from service users about their experiences with accessing community or emergency food services.

“Did not find it hard to afford groceries before the pandemic. With inflation it is hard to keep kids fed.”

“Having to pick to heat my home or feed my family is very hard. We shouldn't have to do this.”

“Destigmatization of food bank usage. It has become a need in this province.”

“I just hope they make a change.”

“I think the federal government should increase the amount of money they send out to seniors, especially seniors like me living below the poverty line.”

“It is hard to live in NL with the wages, taxes, and prices. It is hard for a single person to survive now; and hard for two income families to survive now.”

“I worked all my life and contributed to this province. I'm disabled now, and there is nothing for me.”

“I feel as if I did not have to worry so much about groceries, I would have a better quality of life.”

“I think the programs are great given the funding provided to them. Keep up good work.”

“We need more help. The food bank should at least be weekly.”

“It definitely hurts your pride when you have to go to a food bank. I wish the food banks would modernize and let anyone pick what they need from an actual grocery store. Forming partnerships with grocery stores would be a great idea.”

“Offer two visits per month as there are times between pay days and income support that cause delays in getting money for groceries when utilities also are to be paid.”

“I know they are working with what they have, but better selection tailored to the person when and if possible would work better for a lot of people.”

“We would like to have the opportunity to pick at least a few things that we like, rather than waste what we cannot tolerate.”

“I wish there was an option for delivery.”

“Would you be able to survive on what they give me?”