

BLUEPRINT to fight hunger >

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There is a hunger crisis in the GTA. Use of neighbourhood food banks in the GTA in 2006 continues at record highs. Compared with ten years ago, more people are relying on food banks and they are hungry more often. This is particularly troubling because it is occurring at a time when the economy is strong and unemployment is low. If a recession similar to the one in the early 1990s were to occur, food banks would be stretched beyond the breaking point. The time to act is now.

Daily Bread Food Bank's vision is a Canada where hunger does not exist. We have a plan to achieve this vision. This Blueprint addresses hunger in five priority areas. They are: children, working poor, people with disabilities, immigrants and housing. We can win the fight against hunger by bringing fairness and equity through adequate income to children and people experiencing disabilities; opportunity for the working poor and immigrants; and affordable housing to strengthen the fabric of our communities. In doing so, we will correct the balance in the social safety net by taking the strain off the overworked welfare system. But we need your help and support to do it. Go to www.dailybread.ca to find out how you can make the Blueprint to Fight Hunger a reality.

Children

Every child deserves the best start for their future. However, 38% of people relying on food banks are children. They do not have a fair chance to succeed in life because they are living in such extreme poverty. Our research tells us that almost a quarter of those children are going hungry at least once a week because their families don't have enough money to buy food. As a result, their long-term health and growth will deteriorate, their education will suffer, and they will be less able to compete in the labour-market for stable, well-paying jobs. Breaking the cycle of poverty in the future demands investment in these children now.

- > **The Ontario government should implement a new Ontario Child Benefit of up to \$92 per child per month living in low-income families.** The benefit should be announced in the next budget, along with a commitment that the combination of federal and provincial child benefits will rise to \$4,900 per child over a period of 4 years. The Ontario Child Benefit should replace the portion of social assistance allocated to children, ending the clawback. This will take children off welfare, and open doors to the labour market for their parents.
- > **The federal government must reverse its decision to end the national early learning and child care program.** The loss of affordable, quality child care will force many families, especially single parents, into poverty. A well funded national program will create the child care spaces parents need in order to have the real choice to work and earn enough money to support their children.

Working Poor

Employment should ensure financial security, but it no longer does for many people. The working poor have represented one of the biggest increases in food bank use over the past ten years. Since 1995, households with at least one person working have nearly doubled from 14% to 24% in 2006. Our research shows that the main reason for this increase is not the wages people earn, but the number of hours they are able to get at work. More than half of the people who are working and using food banks earn a wage of \$10.00/hour or more. However, food bank clients work an average of just 25 hours per week. Most say they want more hours, but are unable to get them.

- > **The federal government should create a new national Refundable Tax Credit for the working poor and all low-income earners.** The new credit would consist of two parts: a Working Income Benefit of up to \$2,400/year or \$200/month paid to the working poor; and a Basic Refundable Tax Credit of \$1,800/year, or \$150/month paid to all low-income earners including the working poor.

People with Disabilities

It is often said that the true measure of society is how the most vulnerable are treated. In the last 13 years, income support for people with disabilities in Ontario has increased only 5%. Health conditions for people who are already in poor health are compounded by chronic hunger. Nearly 50% of food bank clients report that a disability or serious illness prevents them from working, but only 38% of those are receiving benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program. Recipients have been made to wait many months before receiving disability benefits.

- > **The Ontario government should set the Ontario Disability Support Program rates to the same level as seniors' benefits.** Over a period of four years, disability rates for a single person should be brought in line and equalized with seniors' benefits for a single person.
- > **The Ontario government should improve access to disability benefits by providing a greater level of help to people during the application process.** Many people applying for ODSP are rejected on the first application, but succeed on appeal with the help of advocacy and legal aid. Providing these services on the initial application would ensure people receive the benefits they are entitled to in a timelier manner.

Immigrants

Canada was built by immigrants who came to this country to find a better life for themselves and their families. They bring with them wide-ranging skills, education, and a capacity to contribute to Canada. However, immigrants are often failed by policies that contradict the spirit in which they are welcomed. Newcomers are having a difficult time settling in Canada. Over 40% of food bank clients in the GTA are foreign born. Nearly half of these immigrants have been in Canada for four years or less. Many are prevented from working in their fields because their professional credentials are not recognized. They are unable to find jobs, even though close to two-thirds have post-secondary education.

- > **Immigrant settlement policies need additional investment by governments at all levels.** Immigrants who have lived in the GTA for four years or less account for 20% of food bank use. This indicates that the first four years are extremely important for new immigrants' ability to integrate. Governments must improve the system by which foreign training, credentials and education are accredited; and increase access to English/ French language instruction.

Housing

Safe and adequate housing is the foundation for strong families. Vibrant communities require housing that is affordable at a range of income levels. But there is not enough affordable housing for people living in the extremes of poverty. A bank will not grant a mortgage to anyone paying more than 32% of their income on housing related costs. Yet people using food banks pay an average of 73% of their income on rent, placing them at serious risk of homelessness. Once their rent is paid, they have just \$4.79 per day to pay for all expenses, including food.

- > **All levels of government must continue to invest in affordable housing and rent supplement programs to create housing where rent is geared to income or is capped at a truly affordable rate in the local community.** To put this in perspective, even a monthly rent of \$477 would mean that a food bank client spends 50% of their income on rent.



WHAT SHOULD BE DONE