

TYPFC Meeting December 1, 2014

Meeting notes prepared by: Kaylen Fredrickson, TYFPC Vice-Chair

Meeting start time: 6:20pm; Meeting end time: 8:00pm

1. Equity statement
2. Introductions (attendance: 22; including: TYFPC members: 8)
3. Committee updates

Executive

- Dilya represented TYFPC at Food Secure Canada – led policy workshop, participated in Youth Caucus: <http://foodsecurecanada.org/who-we-are/what-we-do/our-8th-assembly>

Advocacy

- Volunteers, furniture and clothing drive for Mishkeegogamang First Nation. More details on our blog: <http://tyfpc.ca/uncategorized/mishkeegogamang-first-nation-clothing-drive/>
- Starting up discussion group on food bank accessibility. More details on our blog: <http://tyfpc.ca/events/tyfpc-discussion-meet-up-food-bank-accessibility/>

Education

- Second edition of journal launched and available online. More details on our blog: <http://tyfpc.ca/events/celebrating-the-second-issue-of-gathering/>
- Third edition of peer-reviewed journal open for submissions: deadline May 31, 2015. More details on our blog: <http://tyfpc.ca/announcements/callout-for-gathering-articles/>
- First edition of creative journal submissions: deadline February 28, 2015: <http://tyfpc.ca/announcements/a-new-tyfpc-journal/>
 - Also looking for suggestions for journal name!

4. Speaker biographies

Drew Silverthorn: Drew is currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work program at Ryerson and is one of the primary coordinators of the campus food bank. His role with the food bank, known as the Good Food Centre, has provided him with rich opportunities to develop skills in emergency food relief, urban gardening, and advocacy. Along with his role at the Good Food Centre, Drew is one of the coordinators for Meal Exchange's Students for Good Food For All project at Ryerson. Through this project Drew works with other students to design ways for the Ryerson student body to support the work at the Regent Park Community Food Centre.

Abrah McKeen: Abrah McKeen is working towards her masters of social work at York University, where she is researching the local food movement in relation to whiteness and migrant farm worker programs. During her time as a placement student with the Toronto Food Policy Council, she focused on bringing together food policy with issues of migrant justice and labour justice. She organized a meeting where Solidarity City Network members presented to the

Food Policy Council and wrote a blog post about the Sanctuary City policy as it relates to food banks. She is currently doing a placement at the Ontario Public Services Employees Union.

Aja Peterson:

- Agency Development Coordinator at North York Harvest Food Bank
- Trained as social worker
- Always done community development in food
- Experience with food organizations in Vancouver, Oakland, Toronto
- Introduced to Toronto food scene through Toronto Food Strategy
- Agency development work – works closely with 4 food banks – 3 year process – to train them to have other resources (and extended role) – 6 months into project – new! Will keep us updated.

Yogi Acharya: No One Is Illegal

5. Speaker presentations

Aja, North York Harvest Food Bank

Landscape of food banks

- came about in the 1980s – resulted from claw-backs on social services
- churches and community services put together ad hoc programs; they are not municipal services
- this legacy of unplanned response to social need is still evident
- not soup kitchens or meal programs – people get food for 1-3 days and can access the food bank between twice a week to once a month, depending on the resources and policy of the food bank
- North York Harvest and Daily Bread are the two big, umbrella organizations – act as distribution hubs for small units – also do outreach and advocacy
- The 4 food banks that Aja works with are so different – all food banks are different from one another
 - Some food banks are well-resourced and some are poorly-resourced – no set of standards for food banks – so hard to define – but, ALL:
 - are underfunded (some have NO money),
 - volunteer-run, no/few paid staff,
 - no government funding (some project funding) – interesting to consider because other social services refer to food banks,
 - most food is non-perishable,
 - spectrum of services and philosophies/ideologies of services (some are informed by social justice and food justice; others are entirely rooted in charity) – you can see this spectrum in the messages from food banks
 - Unique food bank attributes
 - some offer other services, such as: public health, legal counselling
 - rural food banks have to procure their own food and donations

- There is pressure and appetite for food banks to change – interesting time to think about it – food banks are getting a lot of media attention

Barriers to accessing food banks:

- hard to find (in TCHC, in basements of churches), especially rurally
- stigma
- wait times (hours of waiting in lines)
- physical barriers (steep stairs)
- hours, times and dates (only open during the day/night)
- language (no interpretation services; lack of training for volunteers)
- lots are in faith-based locations
- locations can be far
- unreliable
- registration required (ID, name – Province of Ontario is requesting online data collection – volunteers need training for sensitivity, proving where you live/catchment-based criteria)
- ID – complicated conversation, not everyone has the capacity for the conversation around ID

Why people use food banks:

- low income
- food banks can become community spaces (witnessed in Vancouver)

What can we (TYFPC community, public, and food banks) do to improve food bank accessibility:

- education, safe space signage, outreach to targeted groups
- youth or different members on Advisory Committees for food banks
- partnerships with community organizations
- ensuring a welcoming and warm space
- volunteer/staff training
- donor and public education about the role of food banks
- teaching discretion: how to use positive discretion
- advocacy: linking food banks to advocacy
- link TYFPC programming to youth that are hard to reach who are accessing the food bank programs and bringing them to the discussion – they have voice/power that is not harnessed

Question: Do you know of any advocacy groups that are currently linked to food banks?

- Advocacy groups in Vancouver would come to food bank and table
- Educating food banks around policies: “Good food organizations” – Community Food Centres Canada – new designation: <http://goodfoodorganizations.ca/>

Drew, Ryerson Good Food Centre

Ryerson Good Food Centre – what is it?

- Ryerson Good Food Centre started in 1992 – one of the oldest campus food centres
- Get food from Daily Bread Food Bank
- No means testing – meaning, they do not require clients to provide information that “qualifies them for the service”
- Open door policy; honesty basis (assume that everyone coming needs the food)
- One of the more progressive distribution methods: food for 3 days, once per week (sometimes people coming at the end of the week get less quantity/variety)
- Community gardens on campus in the summer – getting new rooftop garden and aquaponics – engaging members in gardening

Barriers to accessing the Ryerson Good Food Centre

- time
- quantities (all food distributed in first day or two after it is delivered to Ryerson Good Food Centre)
- lack of awareness of service/lack of awareness of food banks
- context that the food bank is run-in (peers providing emergency food)
- stigma (“How poor do I have to be to use the service?”)
- student hunger is different than other hunger: student hunger is not seen as “legitimate” hunger – school is constructed as a hardship that people need to “get through” – many people who access service are marginalized
- 12 000 students recorded as using food banks in March, 2014 (many food banks do not collect data and would not be included in that study)

Freeze the Fees

- Ryerson Student Union campaign
- province is cutting back on funding – students camped out in front of Ryerson admin building – 7 days of camping before the campus admin met with students – RSU posted statement online
- University should be an exit-strategy from poverty not contributing to poverty

Abrah, former student with Toronto Food Policy Council

Undocumented residents and food bank access

- 200 000 undocumented people in Toronto
- Sanctuary City: passed in February 2013, implementation steps passed in June 2014
- “Access without fear” is a goal of Sanctuary City: Fear of being reported to immigration authorities
- Options: 1. don’t ask; 2. if you find out: don’t share (esp. with police and immigration services)

- Most food banks believe they are accessible at the door – but only 17% didn't require ID or proof of income
- TFPC had meeting in June 2014 about access without fear in relation to food banks – excellent meeting – discussion ran over time by about an hour – ally for any advocacy moving forward
- The Stop Community Food Centre – do require ID (to determine catchment criteria) – as an alternative – The Stop will mail them a piece of mail – this is enough for proof of catchment – Staff are trained in this policy – need to follow up to see if users and the Stop thinks this is working
- Solidarity City Network proposes that immigration data (if its collection is really NEEDED) be recorded anonymously

Significant barrier to implementing Sanctuary City

- Beliefs and prejudices about immigrants
 - the myth that immigrants are “cheating” the system to “steal” social services – when Sanctuary City implementation steps went to City Hall – councillors were putting forward ridiculous arguments/concerns

Potential solutions

- General education about the “real reason” people are undocumented is needed – for example: “Myths and Realities About Immigrants” resource: <http://solidaritycity.net/learn/myths-realities-about-immigrants/>
- Education campaign: access without fear
- Start a platform for food banks to collaborate about implementation – with help from Solidarity City – Sanctuary City has online platform that people can sign up to

Yogi, No One Is Illegal

- People have advocated for Sanctuary City for 10 years – the lead up includes: 2006 – changes to Toronto District School Board; 2011 – changes to women's shelters

Barriers to social service accessibility for undocumented residents

- Two aspects: 1. material barriers; 2. ideological barriers
 - Ideological barrier: widespread oppression of immigrants (esp. people of colour, esp. when poor)
- In order to understand barriers, we need to understand:
 - Why is it that people become undocumented? Systemically?
 - What are the trends that have led to 500 000 undocumented residents?
 - Look at: Hunger Count report: <http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/HungerCount> and Put Food In the Budget report: <http://putfoodinthebudget.ca/>
 - We have to look at immigration system at a whole: And who controls it? Who are the decision makers accountable to? Who do they serve?

- Immigration policies shape national identity – primary driver of immigration is ECONOMICS – to “manage the labour market” – immigration policies govern people
- Global capitalism – main driver maximization of profit – labour power – a push to lower the cost to increase profit
- Immigration system is most powerful tool to manage labour power – hierarchical list of people – each with set of rights – racial hierarchy – legally puts people in a position where they have limited say over their working conditions to push for profits – temporary residents on the rise/citizenship less and less likely
- The system is not “broken” – the system is doing exactly what it is designed to do – divide people
- 80% of jobs created since 2008 are temporary – many people’s work is precarious
- System is designed for those higher up to point at those lower down and blame them for “cue-jumping”, “job-stealing” – blaming them for the economic system instead of those that gut jobs, gut benefits, gut unions, etc.

6. Discussion

Question: How to implement Sanctuary City policies into food banks?

Aja:

- North York Harvest Food bank doesn’t have close relationships with all its food banks
- Practical issues: Can’t afford stamps or envelopes with no budget
- Theoretical issues: Long process to bring up discussions on global capitalism, etc.
- Food banks would need a lot of support to implement those policies

Question: What are the down sides of standardizing food banks?

- Doesn’t need to be further institutionalized – with cuts to social services – they have become permanent
- Hunger Report placed Food Banks Canada in context of affordable housing and wages
- We need to call for other social support and hopefully decrease need for food banks

Question: How do we turn these issues into advocacy and education? Concrete actions?

What are we asking people to do? How can we advance Sanctuary Cities?

- Aja: civic engagement: getting people to vote
- Abrah: ideological piece is a big barrier because if people really believe that undocumented residents deserve services – then they won’t get services – so education is key
 - Also – Sanctuary City has been around for over a year – food banks shouldn’t be asking for ID – educate and advocate

- Drew: Guaranteed income is a better focus – look at work of Valerie Tarasuk – though this approach is still problematic because food is framed as a commodity

Question: Is there something that people who are not involved in food banks can do to advocate for changes to food banks without being antagonistic towards food banks (working together vs. butt-heads)?

Aja

- Food bank people are pitted against others in the food movement
- There's never food security people at food banks
- TYFPC could recruit food bank users to advocacy movements – on the ground, at the food banks themselves
- Solidarity City outreach/advocacy for food bank users

Yogi

- Focus on issue behind food bank usage: why do people use food bank? They don't have enough money. That is a common issue that groups can collaborate on. Advocating for wages, Ontario Disability Support Program, Ontario Works, etc. Push against things that make people's lives precarious.
- Example legislation: *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* – could be a model – mandatory training for service providers on working with people with disabilities
- Big challenge though: Food banks don't receive money from government – so hard to implement – not tied to funding
- Toronto District School Board – immigration is not a requirement – but No One Is Illegal still receives calls where people are not able to enroll their kids
- Sanctuary City – still need advocacy for implementation
- Need innovative ideas for how to get policies into action: and across a spectrum: no money/lots of money; no education/lots of education

Question: What role does North York Harvest Food Bank play with food banks?

- Food distribution
- Outreach and community relations (but spread very thin)

7. Announcements

Other resources:

- Professor Valerie Tarasuk, University of Toronto Professor with lots of publications about food banks and emergency food: <http://nutrisci.med.utoronto.ca/faculty/Tarasuk/>
- Book: *Undoing Border Imperialism*: <http://www.akpress.org/undoing-border-imperialism.html>
- Raise the Minimum Wage campaign: <http://raisetheminimumwage.ca/>