



THE STOP COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE:
BUILDING COMMUNITY, FEEDING CHANGE

2021 COVID IMPACT REPORT

JANUARY 2021-OCTOBER 2021
WWW.THESTOP.ORG



WHAT'S NEW?

The pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges for The Stop's community. In our last report, we saw the need persist, and continue to grow, from 2020 to 2021.

In this report, we outline the impact our donors, community, volunteers, and staff have continued to have through the pandemic. The Stop will keep looking to help those most affected recover from the harms caused by income loss, social isolation, and poor nutrition.

INTRODUCTION



45,029

Meals served from
January 1st 2021
to Sept 30, 2021



60,000+

Projected meals
served at 1884
Davenport in 2021

4

Days a week the
drop in is open for
breakfast and lunch



1884 Drop-in Program

Take away meal program

Nutritious food is a human right

Outside of COVID, individuals would come and be served while seated at round tables in our drop-in space. We have been unable to safely host our community members for almost 2 years, and have been continuing our take away meal service.

We have provided thousands of healthy and culturally appropriate meals to vulnerable community members. Our chefs and kitchen volunteers have settled into a routine; getting used to packing food into hundreds of containers. We're going to be so efficient when we go back to plated food!





Volunteer



"Here at The Stop, I've experienced happiness and a new sense of belonging."

- Community Kitchen Participant

19%

Increase in
takeaway meals
from July 2020 vs.
Sept 2021.

50%

Increase in takeout
lunches from July
2020 vs. Sept 2021.

“

*The Stop is important
for me because I get to
connect with others and
meet people.*

- Fabunmi



Wychwood Open Door

Take away meal program

Serving our community

Our newest location is a Drop-In centre that serves precariously housed and socially isolated people in Toronto's mid-town St. Clair West community. Along with a healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner, we offer life skills training, harm reduction services, community advocacy, and games and leisure activities.

Changes through COVID

We have transitioned to exclusively take-out meals. This takes additional:

- Planning and time to package each meal, which means less time to cook
- Labour, as we are trying to do more with less time and fewer volunteers





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"What most stands out for me about The Stop is that everyone is always very welcoming."

- Phil, Community Member

The Food Bank

Critical access to healthy food

The power of healthy food

Our Food Bank continues to provide a three-day supply of food to individuals and families who live in the GTA and beyond. We've continued access to our foodbank by offering hampers 2x per month (up from 1x).

Due to COVID, we had to adapt to a walk-through Food Bank model. This helped people get their food hampers quickly and being able to move people along as to not have them in groups. Staff and volunteers have stayed connected to participants in a safe way by checking in with each community member. We try to make meaningful connections in a more limited capacity due to the pandemic and safety needs.

“

There's a lot of variety in the food hampers and I enjoy the meals I am able to make from the hampers. I am also surprised about how much food there is and I am happy with the fresh produce choices.

-Food Bank Participant



Each of our files represents
a family of 1-9 people

7,137

Files served in our
food bank.

13%

Increase in files at
our food bank from
last year.

9%

Increase in youth
under 18.

From Jan - Sept 2020 to
Jan - Sept 2021

Community Kitchens

Gathering in the Garden

Learn, Cook and Share Meals

Our Community Kitchens bring people together to learn, cook, and share nutritious, culturally diverse, and inexpensive meals.

Through the pandemic, this program has seen a few iterations from online classes to meal kits and now to gathering at Earls court Community Garden. This fall we hosted 6 cooking sessions in collaboration with our urban garden and saw individuals and families with kids.

Our Community Kitchens teach Community Members:

- Gardening methods and techniques
- Hands-on earth-work activities and gardening skills
- Reducing social isolation
- Mindfulness and awareness in caring for the land; to change behaviors and attitudes towards improving the environment
- The connection between land, food production and eating well
- New cooking skills
- How to celebrate culturally appropriate food together, to learn from others and share their pride from their practices and traditions



“

“Being in the garden feels like a mini vacation”

- Liz, Community Kitchen Participant



Healthy Beginnings

Peri-Natal Nutrition and Support

Information, Education, Support

Healthy Beginnings is a weekly drop-in program for new and expectant mothers. The women are on a low income and often experience a combination of challenging life circumstances such as single parenting, poor housing, mental health, marginalization, recent immigration, and language barriers

Traditional programming has been suspended since March 2020. In addition to weekly hamper and grocery gift cards, we've been:

- Sending a weekly e-news with info on pregnancy, mental health supports, online support groups
- Conducting weekly check-ins and “wellness calls”
- Connecting on our WhatsApp group where moms can share and maintain social connections
- Providing baby essentials
- Creating healthy recipes to include with our hampers
- Distributing surveys to participants to gauge the way they/their families have been impacted by COVID and what types of supports they need.

“

Some positive that has come out of the past year has been meeting other mums and sharing our experiences of motherhood; Meeting new people who I didn't know I would meet.

- Rita, Healthy Beginnings Participant



56%

are having trouble paying rent due to COVID income loss

47%

are more anxious a year after the beginning of COVID

39%

had to move because they had trouble paying rent

Survey from June 2021



Emotional Wellness Peer Support Program

At Wychwood Open Door

Support From a Distance

Many of our community members are dealing with social isolation and lack of connection to their community. In response to these findings, we started to distribute activity packages which included Stop service information, self-care tips, word search puzzles, other games to keep your mind healthy, and disposable masks. Community Members also choose a personal care item which can include: toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, deodorant, razors, water bottles, totes, t-shirts, hats, and gloves.

Changes through COVID

Due to social distancing protocols, our Emotional Wellness Peer Support Program went from pre-pandemic small groups to no in-person events. Instead of having longer conversations with a handful of Community Members, we've had the opportunity to have short interactions with many more people.

243

Average support packages distributed each month in 2020

343

Average support packages distributed each month in 2021

41%

Increase in support packages distributed per month from 2020 to 2021



“

"Coming here each week is part of my medicine. To be in the nature, to put my hands in the soil, this I know is keeping me healthy."

- EarlsCourt Garden Volunteer



Urban Agriculture

Earlscourt Garden

Earlscourt Community Garden is a hop, skip and a jump away from our 1884 Davenport location. Here you can get your hands dirty in our urban garden that is over 2,000 sq. ft!

We grow vegetables, herbs and pollinator plants in our shared space for The Stop's Food Bank and meal programs; our volunteers are also able to take home 50% of the harvest.

Majority of our garden volunteers are community members who access our services, like our food bank and meal program and do not have access to outdoor space. Here they learn about environmental issues, organic gardening and sustainable farming methods throughout the season.

This growing season we:

- Hosted 10 outdoor workshops including seed saving, composting, invasive species, native plants, tree grafting
- Increase of 100%, from 2 to 4 sessions a week as COVID restrictions abated, with a strong community desire for more next year!
- Even hosted up to 5 sessions per week through the summer with as many as 15 community members per session!
- Planted in excess of 600 seedlings over the season
- Increased the active gardening bed area by 320 sq ft from areas that weren't able to be used



Urban Agriculture

Greenhouse

Safely Moving Outside

We were able to safely shift our programming outdoors with scheduled garden volunteer sessions. While most of our programming moved outside, we made important infrastructure improvements including new lights, shades and a watering system. All this in preparation for more productive and higher-volume indoor growing, hosting harvest pick-ups and deliveries and future volunteer sessions.

This summer we:

- Hosted 39 volunteer sessions
- Accumulated 350 volunteer hours
- Harvested 201kg of veggies

“

The support we receive makes all the difference in our lives. You care about our family; our mental, emotional and physical health..

- Program Participant





“

"My experience with The Stop and the Mashkiki garden has been exciting and educational. I had the opportunity to engage in many teaching sessions both as a participant and a coordinator. I enjoy getting to learn more about the medicinal plants and their many properties. Coming from a construction background it has also been a very peaceful and humbling experience."

Program Participant

Mashkikii;aki'ing

Medicine Wheel Garden

In May, we were finally able to schedule in-person sessions where we partnered with the Sagatay program from Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence) to animate the garden at Hillcrest Park, which includes the Mashkikii;aki'ing (Medicine Earth) Medicine Wheel Garden.

This partnership provides the men of the Apaenmowineen (Having Confidence in Oneself) program the opportunity to share teachings and learn more about plant medicine, gardening, and healthy living.

A new partnership

We also partnered with Toronto EarthKeepers and engaged participants from Sagatay in a garden animation program at Spadina Museum. We have been able to get several men from Sagatay to participate at Spadina. Men from Sagatay and NaMeRes have expressed their hopes of programming continuing throughout the winter, possibly in the greenhouse.

This growing season we've:

- Produced over 50lbs of food used for meals and during programming with participants
- Food grown includes; bok choy, beans, orange habanero, Thai chili, jalapeño, lemon drop peppers, swiss chard, cucumber, tomato, basil, string beans, corn, squash, pumpkin, radish





The Stop's Farmers' Market

Supporting Local Farms

Connecting Our Community

The Stop's Wychwood Barns Farmers' Market strives to create space for farmers, vendors and community members from diverse backgrounds and is engaged in an ongoing consultation to address barriers to participation in our space.

We are now running a year-round farmers market again after a short hiatus from November 2020 - May 2021. This year we have supported 47 vendors at the market.

We are currently seeing about 2,500 customers at the market which is comparable to pre-pandemic years and higher than last year.

We welcomed 3 new BIPOC-run farms this year; we had been in contact with all of them pre-COVID and were able to support them to join the market this year.

We've been purchasing Farmers' Market produce for the Good Food Market/Café to increase access to local, culturally appropriate food.



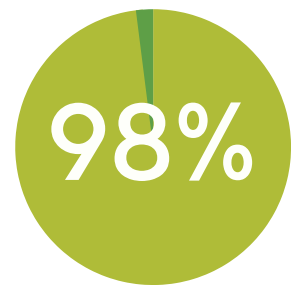


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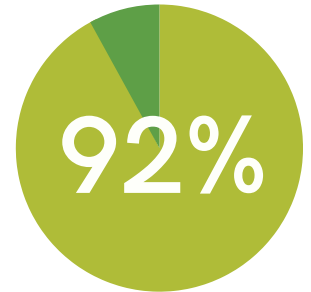
“When we think of The Stop, we think of all the goodness it has provided to us and to many other community members. We are forever grateful.

- Farmers Market Vendor





look forward to their volunteer shift, and are satisfied with their role



believe that volunteering helps them meet their personal goals

Volunteer Program

Vital to our Community Building Work

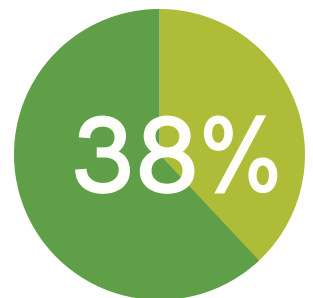
Volunteering through COVID

Volunteers who have been consistently on the front line during the pandemic are looking forward to taking more breaks. Following public health guidelines, we've taken the necessary safety measures to allow more volunteers who are older than 65 to return to regular shifts.

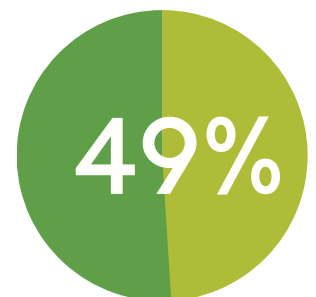
Through COVID, due to social distancing and other concerns, we've seen:

- 58% fewer volunteers in COVID
- 40% fewer volunteer hours in COVID

We were able to host a volunteer appreciation event in September, where we celebrated all those who support our programming. Over 70 people enjoyed delicious food, music, games and social connections.



of volunteers spend time with other volunteers outside of their time at The Stop



of our volunteers live, work, or play in the Davenport West Community



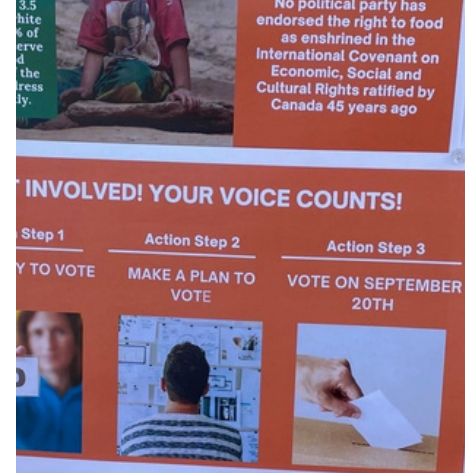
Community Advocacy Program

Action, Support, Empowerment

CAP empowers people to challenge chronic income and food insecurity by building stronger community support networks, raising political consciousness, and taking direct action. The Community Advocacy Office is a peer-run project where trained advocates (who are also community members) provide information, referrals, and general assistance to fellow community members. All services are strictly confidential.

Community Engagement

This September we organized successful civic engagement tables showcasing the Federal Elections. We had some information available for our community members about how and where to vote, where the political parties stand on different topics and why it's important to vote.



January - September 2021



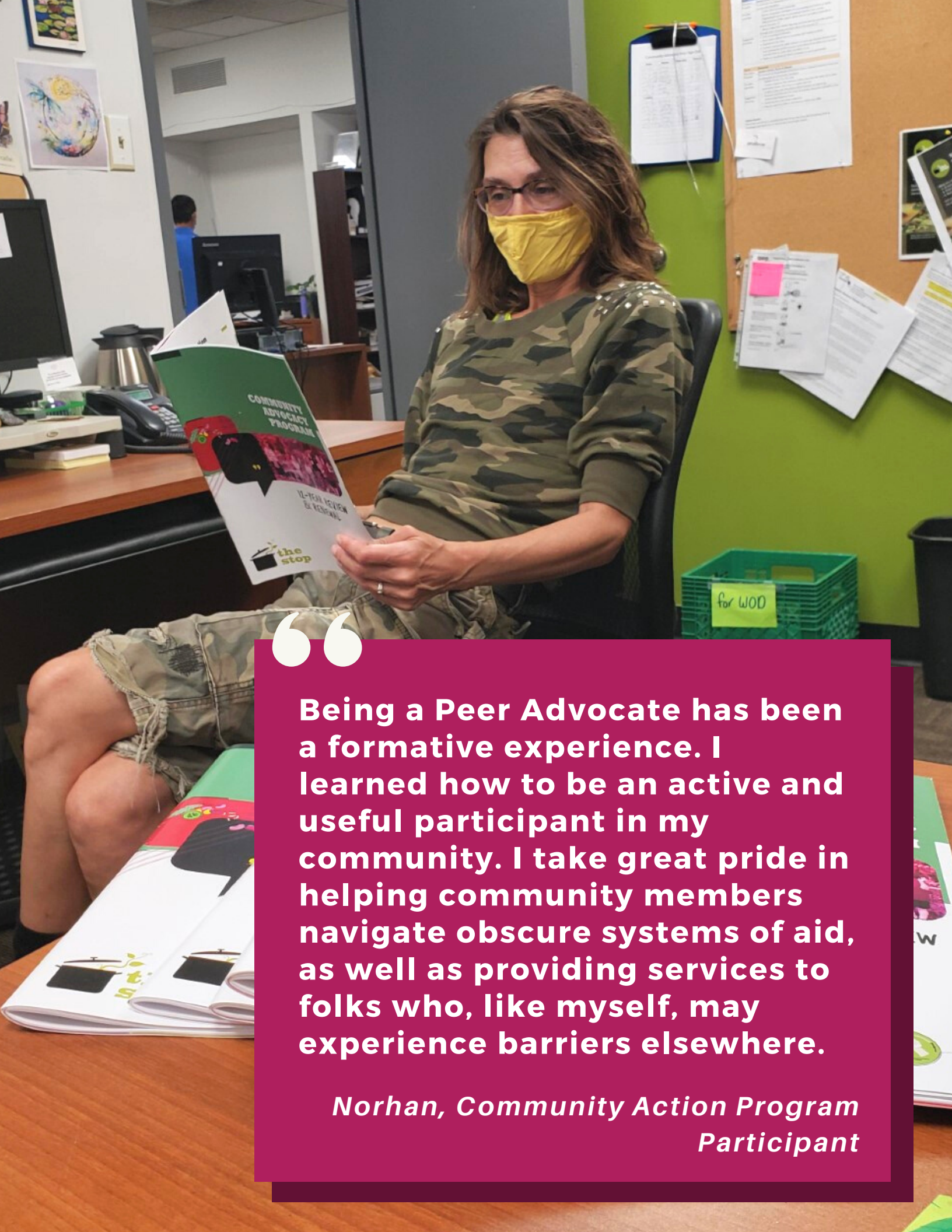
Serviced almost 900 community members at our walk-through window



Answered 731 calls on our help line



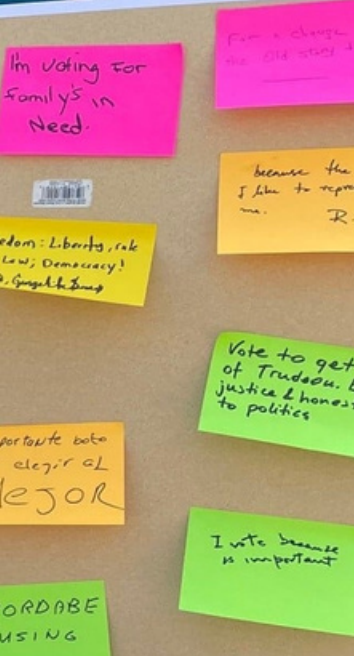
Made 299 referrals to community services



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Being a Peer Advocate has been a formative experience. I learned how to be an active and useful participant in my community. I take great pride in helping community members navigate obscure systems of aid, as well as providing services to folks who, like myself, may experience barriers elsewhere.

Norhan, Community Action Program Participant



Became a Certified Living Wage Employer

The importance of a living wage in Toronto

A living wage is not the same as the minimum wage, which is the legal minimum all employers must pay. The living wage sets a higher standard and reflects what individuals need to bring home based on the actual costs of living in a specific area. Communities not making a living wage are most at risk of being impacted by the enormous economic and health threats COVID-19 poses. We're excited to join a growing number of organizations and employers across Ontario providing a living wage. The living wage in Toronto is \$22.08 per hour, which is \$2,867/month or just over \$42,900/year.

The impact of a living wage at The Stop

By making this change across The Stop, we provided 27 (3 full-time and 24 part-time) additional employees with a living wage. The lowest hourly wage at our organization was \$17.00/hour, which was \$2.75 per hour more than the minimum wage in Ontario. Now it is \$22.08, which is \$7.73 more per hour than minimum wage,.

A living wage is over \$15,000 more than a minimum wage annually.



Public policy work

Pushing for important changes

Increased social assistance rates

Through the process of becoming a Certified Living Wage Employer, we found that this was the perfect opportunity to advocate for everyone in Toronto to make a living wage, especially those on social assistance. We have revamped our 2009 "Do The Math" campaign, which engaged thousands of Torontonians to write to their MPPs in support of higher social assistance rates, into an online quiz to gauge who can actually afford to live in Toronto. In line with the federal election, this public policy advocacy piece was accompanied by a letter to all federal party leaders, which was cosigned by the Ontario Living Wage Network and over 20 other local organizations and foundations.

Letters to our representatives

As an organization, we sent our representatives a letter calling on them to push forward significant measures to address the harms done to Indigenous peoples by insisting that all levels of government provide adequate resources and attention to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions 94 Calls to Action.



200+

Service users surveyed on their public policy priorities

23

Organizations cosigned our letter to federal party leaders

33%

Someone on ODSP will receive \$14,028 a year. Less than 33% of a Living Wage in Toronto



SUPPORT OUR WORK | CONTACT US



TO SUPPORT OUR WORK OR GET IN TOUCH



DONATE | DONATE@THESTOP.ORG

We count on dedicated supporters to fund our work and receive little government funding. Most of our funding comes from individuals like you!



VOLUNTEER | DIANE@THESTOP.ORG

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization. We always need more welcoming faces, helping hands, and committed individuals.

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