

# Neighbour Impact Survey Report



## Nourishing Communities: A Journey of Rescuing Food and Impacting Lives

Food for Life is revolutionizing how we address poverty, food loss, and environmental sustainability. With a passionate team of 18 dedicated individuals working hand in hand with our incredible network of 500+ volunteers, we're on a mission to impact communities across Hamilton and Halton profoundly.

We believe everyone deserves access to nourishing food, regardless of their circumstances. When people are hungry, nothing else matters. Everything starts with food.

Our core values – Dignity, Collaboration, Sustainability, Integrity, and Innovation – are the foundation of everything we do. With a dual commitment to people and planet, Food for Life supports over 100 food programs across Halton and Hamilton, serving 4000+ households each week. Annually, we rescue over 4.6 million lbs of food, ensuring that imperfect, surplus yet nutritious and quality food isn't wasted, preventing over 6 million kgs of greenhouse gases from harming our planet.

By bringing food to people where they feel most comfortable, in their neighbourhoods, and partnering with social service organizations, we help individuals to overcome the barriers of poverty. Food becomes a catalyst for positive change, whether promoting good health or providing economic relief that allows limited resources to be directed toward progress. Our unique no proof of poverty food distribution model is at the forefront of our operations.

We measure success not just in pounds of food provided, but in the health, financial, and social well-being of our neighbours. By addressing food insecurity through fresh food access, we alleviate stress, improve diet quality, and enhance overall health outcomes. By reducing reliance on low-cost, nutritionally poor foods or skipping meals, we mitigate the risk and severity of nutrition-related chronic illnesses, relieving pressure on the local healthcare system and improving health outcomes for our neighbours.

We recognize that food security is not solely a matter of access, but of income. Many of our neighbours, while responding as "food secure" on the 8-item Food Insecurity Experience Scale, are only experiencing food security due to a dependence on the food support system. They continue to face financial instability, precarious income, and lack the true food security only provided by adequate sustained income supports. By offering barrier-free access to nutritious food, we empower households to redirect limited resources toward other essentials, reducing debt, and fostering financial security and stability.

At Food for Life, we're more than just a food distribution organization; we're community builders. Our programs nurture connections, foster trust, and strengthen bonds, ensuring that no neighbour feels alone in their journey. Through meaningful connections and shared resources, we cultivate a sense of belonging and resilience within our community. By nurturing these relationships, we lay the foundation for lasting change and collective well-being.

The following annual research document is made possible with thanks to the Gould Family, who have supported innovation and community impact through their funding of our research program.

We would also like to thank our neighbours, for taking the time to provide insightful and meaningful feedback, suggestions, and guidance through not only this research report but others throughout the year. Thank you!

As you delve into this report, we hope you gain insight into the depth and breadth of our impact. We value your insights and questions, if you would like to get in touch regarding the report please contact our Manager of Research, Dianna Williams at [Dianna@FoodForLife.Ca](mailto:Dianna@FoodForLife.Ca).

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Randell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen Randell  
Executive Director

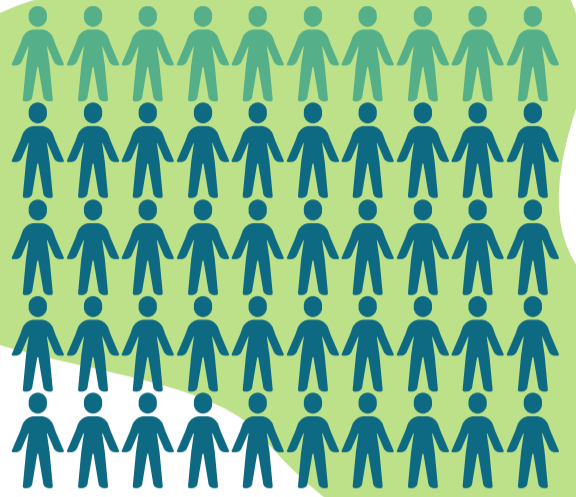
# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Food for Life collected voluntary survey responses from community members who access our programs, our 'neighbours', on the impact of our programs on their food security, health, finances, and overall wellbeing

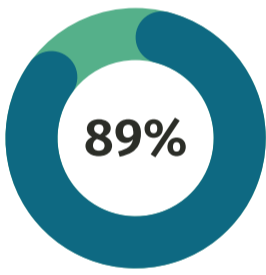
## About the Survey

- **Impact survey** collected demographics and measured program outcomes
- **318 unique responses** (289 online & 29 paper) collected between September-December, 2023 - representing 10% (1 in 10) of our total Neighbour population (approx. 3200 active households)
- **Representing 37 program locations** across Halton municipalities
- **Invitations to participate over email and through program visits** with paper surveys translated in 5 additional languages to ensure data represents the geographic and diverse communities we serve

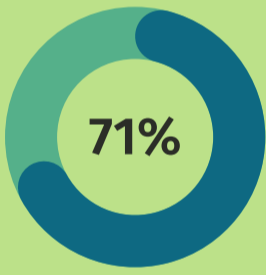


## Impacts on Overall Health

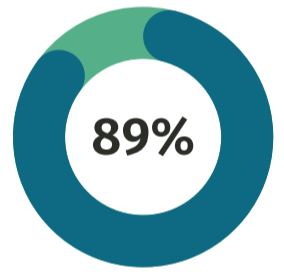
**89%** agreed that receiving food from Food for Life positively impacts their overall health



**89%** agreed that accessing food from Food for Life helps them to stretch their budget so they have money for bills and other necessary expenses

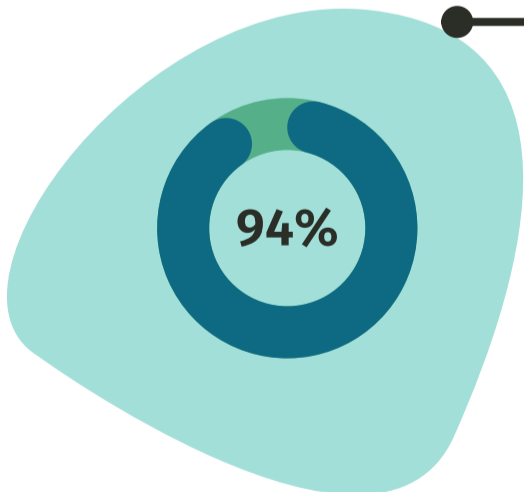


**71%** agreed that receiving food from Food for Life decreases their need to access additional food support programs



**89%** agreed that the food they receive from Food for Life increases their access to fresh and healthy food items

## Dietary & Food Needs



- **94%** reported the food they receive from Food for Life is appropriate for their culture and/ or beliefs
- **85%** agreed that the food they receive from Food for Life is appropriate for their dietary needs
- **73%** agreed that their Food for Life program has met their food needs
- **55%** reported dietary improvements since receiving food from Food for Life

## Weekly Savings

- On average our neighbours reported they are saving **\$51.68** per week on groceries by receiving food from Food for Life programs
- Market programs (Mountainside & Tremaine) average higher, noting weekly savings of **\$101+**
- **68%** reported accessing our programs weekly

**\$51.68**  
Average self-reported weekly savings per household across all program types

**"THANK YOU!!!! I always have fresh food to eat." - Neighbour**

\*All percentages displayed in document have been rounded . Percentages displayed with blue or red arrows indicate statistically significant data points for the sample at a 95% confidence level.

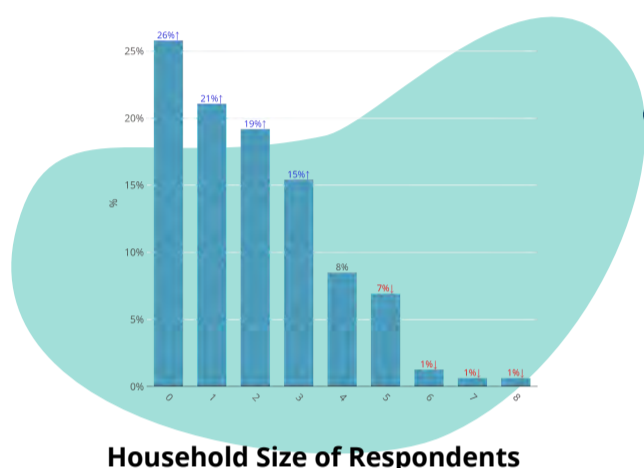
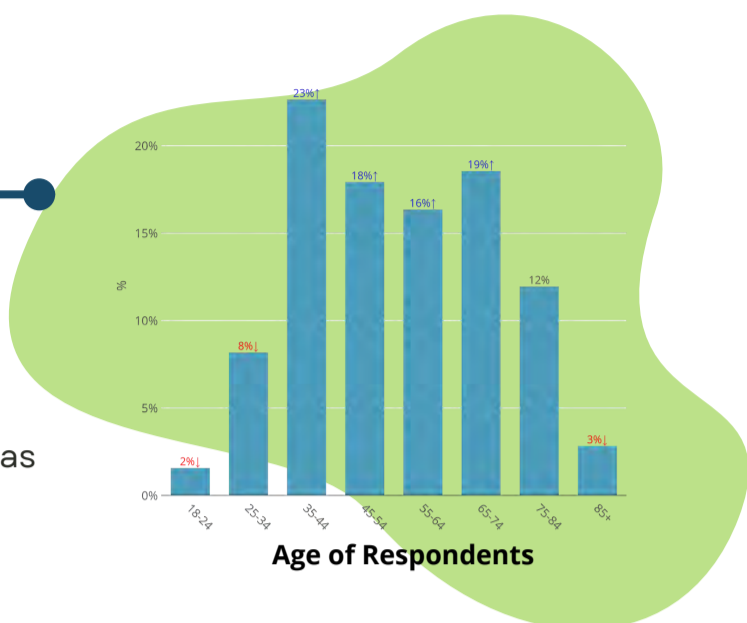
# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



## Neighbour Demographics

### Age Group, Gender, Racial Identity, & Preferred Language

- Our largest neighbour age demographic represented is the **35-44** age group (**23%**), followed by **65-74** (**19%**)
- Most (**76%**) identify as Woman/ Girl as their gender
- Over half (**66%**) identify as White/ Caucasian as their racial identity
- **7%** identify as a Person of Colour
- **4%** identify as Indigenous
- **3%** identify as Black
- **85%** selected English as their preferred language

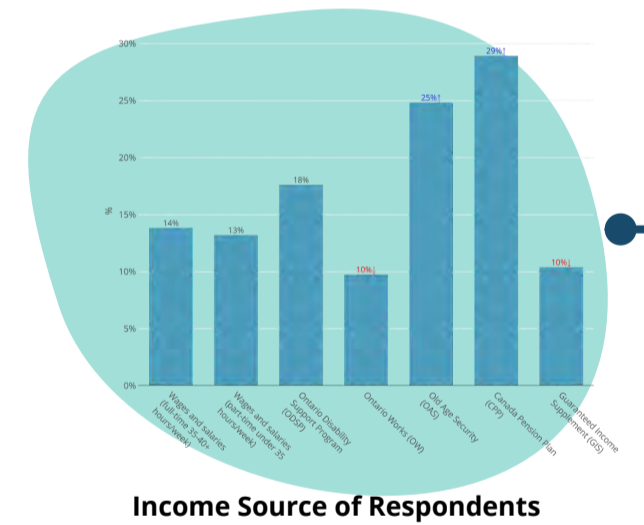
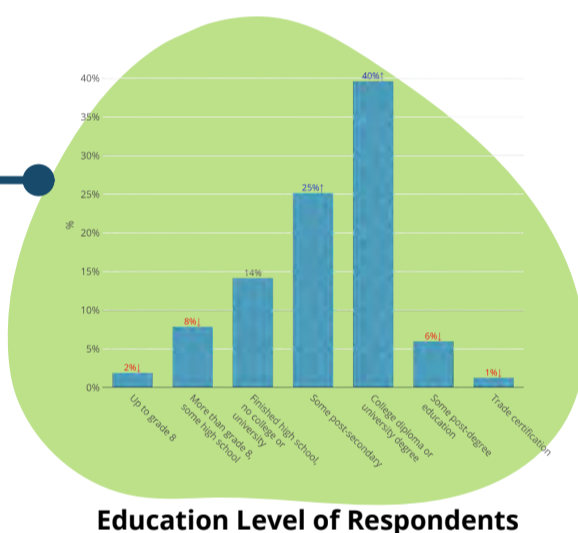


### Household Size & Dependents

- Over half of our neighbours reported living alone (**26%**) or with one (**21%**) or two (**19%**) others
- Household sizes of four or more people were less common
- Average household size = **2.12 people**
- Average number of dependents = **0.97 people**

### Education Level

- **40%** reported having a college diploma or university degree
- **25%** reported having some post-secondary education

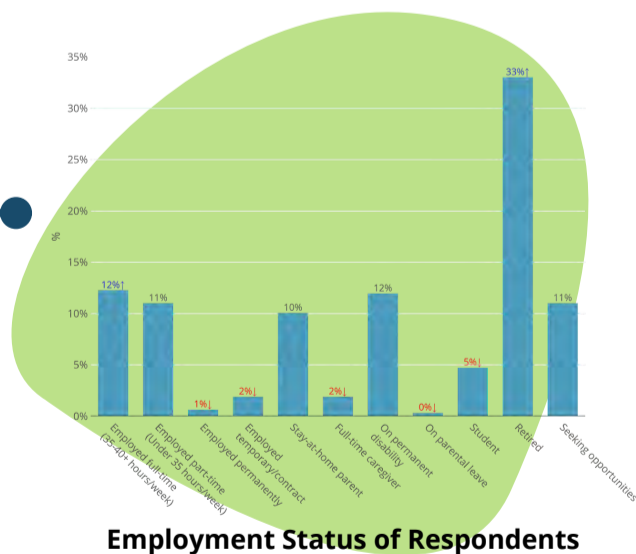


### Sources of Income

- Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (**29%**), Old Age Security (OAS) (**25%**), and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (**18%**) were the highest reported sources of income

### Employment Status

- Retired (**33%**), Employed full-time (35-40+ hours) (**12%**), and On Permanent Disability (**12%**) were the highest reported employment statuses



### Demographics by Program Type

- **Gender, racial identity, preferred language, education level, and disability status** remained consistent across all program types (Market, Community, In-Building)
- **Age:** 62% of market program attendees are between the ages of 25-54, community program attendees represent diverse age ranges, while 70% of in-building program attendees are between the ages of 65-85+.
- **Household Size & Children/ Dependents:** In-building program attendees were more likely to live alone and less likely to have children/ dependents than the other program types.
- **Source(s) of Income & Employment Status:** market program attendees were more likely to report working full-time and utilizing wages and salaries from full-time work as source of income. Community program attendees were more likely to report ODSP as their source of income. In-building program attendees were more likely to report being retired and utilizing CPP, OAS, and GIS as sources of income.

### Disability Status



**>1 in 3 (35%)** consider themselves to be a person with a disability

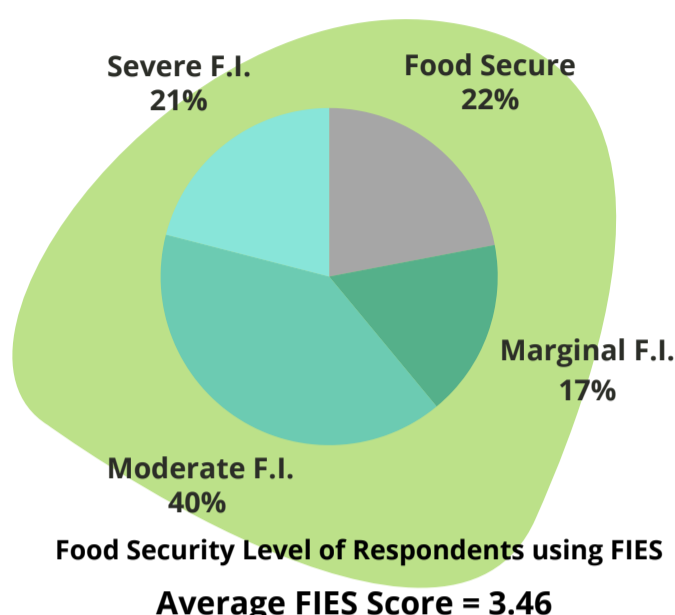
# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



## Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

### FIES Survey Module

The United Nations Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is a internationally-recognized and empirically valid self-reported 8-item experience-based measure of household food security



- **Almost half (40%)** of those who responded are **moderately food insecure** and experience compromises in quality and quantity of food consumed
- **22%** are **food secure** and feel well-supported through food access, but are not necessarily income secure
- **21%** are **severely food insecure** and experience reduced food intake and missed meals
- **17%** are **marginally food insecure** and experience worry about food

\*FIES raw scores are calculated using the number of affirmative responses to a series of 8 questions asking 'During the last 30 days, was there a time when, because of a lack of money or other resources...'. Scores are grouped into categories based on Health Canada's criteria for food security status.

### Food Secure, Support Reliant

**At Food for Life, we understand food security as an issue of insufficient income. While many of our neighbours fall into the category of 'Food Secure', they are not necessarily income secure and are often reliant on their ability to continue to access food supports to maintain their food security.**

### Food Security by Neighbour Characteristics

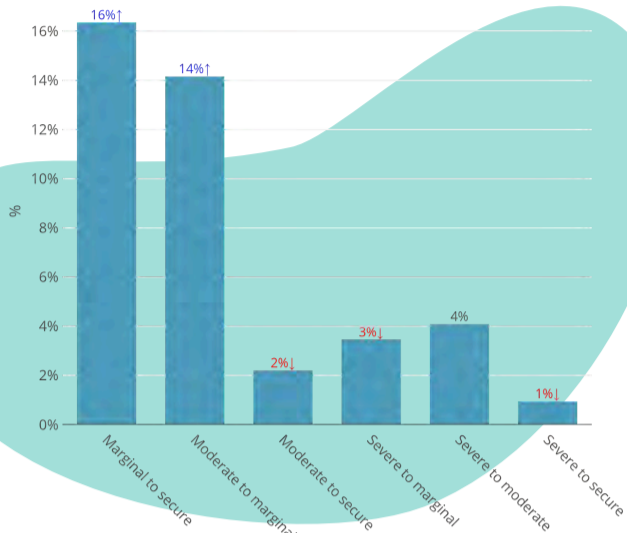
- **Age:** Neighbours aged 18-24, 25-34, and 45-54 were most prone to severe food insecurity, while those aged 75+ were most food secure.
- **Gender:** Both women and men experienced similar rates of food insecurity.
- **Language:** Farsi, Mandarin, Punjabi, & Urdu speakers were most likely to face moderate to severe food insecurity.
- **Employment Status:** Retired neighbours had the highest food security rates. Students and those on permanent disability were most likely to face moderate or severe food insecurity.
- **Source(s) of Income:** ODSP or OW reliance correlated with severe food insecurity; CPP, OAS, or GIS as income sources correlated with food security. ODSP as income source shows higher likelihood of food security change overall, while CPP, OAS, and GIS often transition from marginal to secure.
- **Racial Identity & Education Level:** No significant relationships found with food security.
- **Disability Status:** Those identifying as disabled were more likely to experience severe food insecurity but also showed more improvements in food security status.
- **Household size & Children/Dependents:** Those living alone were more likely to be food secure, while larger households (4+) faced higher rates of moderate and severe food insecurity.
- **Monthly Food Budget:** Insufficient food budgets (\$50 or less per month) correlated with severe food insecurity; higher budgets (\$300 or more per month) correlated with food security.
- **Diet Quality & Food Groups:** Poor self-reported diet quality correlated with higher food insecurity, while adequate access over the past 30 days to food groups (fruits & vegetables, protein, grains) correlated with food security.
- **Program Type:** Market program attendees were more likely to experience moderate and severe food insecurity; in-building program attendees were more likely to be food secure.
- **Frequency & Duration of Access:** Weekly program attendance correlated with food security; longer attendance durations also correlated with higher food security.
- **Needed Community Supports:** Severely food insecure neighbours were more likely to report they need information on additional food programs, financial services, and mental health support.

# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



## Health Impacts

Improving a household's food security status through fresh food access helps to reduce stress, raise diet quality and nutrition, and support overall health and wellbeing for our neighbours



Level of Food Security Improvement of Respondents

### Improvements to Food Security

>1 in 3 (41%) of those who responded have experienced positive changes to their food security status since accessing food from a Food for Life program

- 131 unique households
- 264 unique individuals over 18
- Movement from marginal to secure (16%) and moderate to marginal (14%) were the highest reported levels of improvement

"[Food for Life] saved my life from starvation, quite honestly." - Neighbour

Improvements to food security status positively impact both household-level change as well as larger impacts and cost-savings to society

### Healthcare Savings

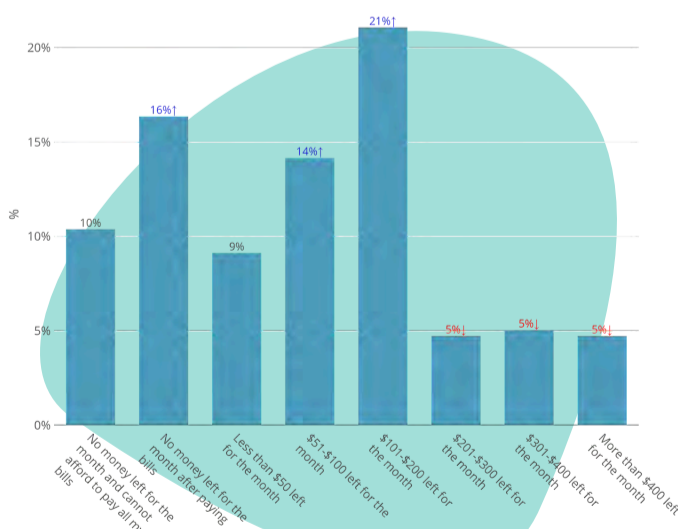
**\$132,281.19 for 2023 for 131 households**

- Food security and health are deeply connected and prolonged experiences of food insecurity result in poor physical and mental health outcomes and increased healthcare utilization
- Through providing barrier free fresh food support, there are improvements to food security status resulting in healthcare savings through decreased healthcare service utilization and reduction of long-term chronic disease risk and improved chronic disease outcomes
- In 2023, Food for Life programs have contributed to \$132,281.19 in healthcare savings to our local health infrastructure for the respondents who have experienced improvements to their food security status since accessing our programs

Source: PROOF Research (2016)

\*Healthcare savings are calculated by using 'before/ after' accessing Food for Life questions to determine changes to food security status at point of data collection. Household values were determined by assessing household size minus children/ dependents under 18. Amount of healthcare savings were assigned for each household based on length of service utilization (for a maximum time frame up to one year) and use of other food supports outside of Food for Life programs (attribution value assigned). Healthcare savings values were quantified by PROOF Research in 2016 for adults between the ages of 18-64. For reporting purposes, the same values have been applied to adults 65+ as data for this age demographic is unavailable although there is high confidence that similar healthcare experiences and expenditures would apply to adults 65+. Studies are available that highlight how malnutrition for this age group results in increased hospital stays and hospital costs (Curtis et al. 2016). Healthcare savings values have been inflated to 2023 costs. Statements in this report do not reflect the interests of PROOF Research's top-down policy-driven approach to reducing food insecurity.

## Monthly Food Budget



Monthly Food Budget of Respondents

\$101-\$200 left for food (21%), No money left for food after paying bills (16%), and \$51-\$100 left for food (14%) were the highest reported amounts left for a monthly food budget after paying other necessary expenses

Accessing Food for Life programs helps to fill the monthly gap for our neighbours whose budget for food after expenses is inadequate to meet their household's food needs

One-person adult household Nutritious Food Basket cost in 2023 = \$455/ month

Family of four household Nutritious Food Basket cost in 2023 = \$1,257/ month

Source: Halton Region (2023)

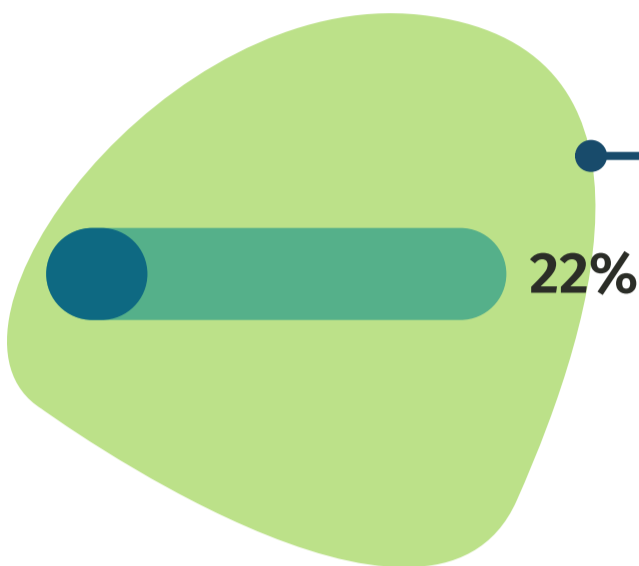
"I have money left by not buying so much food at stores to help me pay for my medications and diabetic needs." - Neighbour

# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



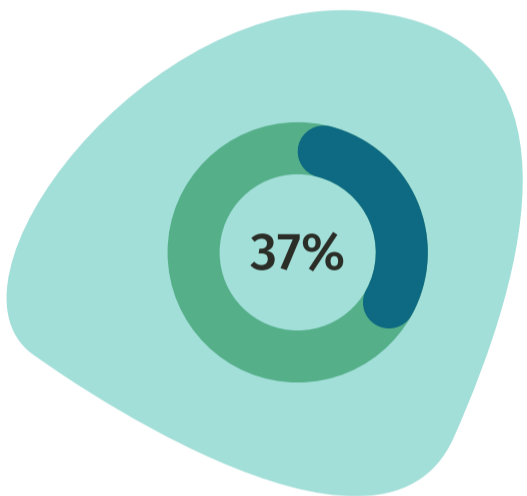
## Financial Impacts

Improving a household's food security status through fresh food access helps to leave limited income for other life expenses, reduces the need to take on debt, and supports building financial security for our neighbours



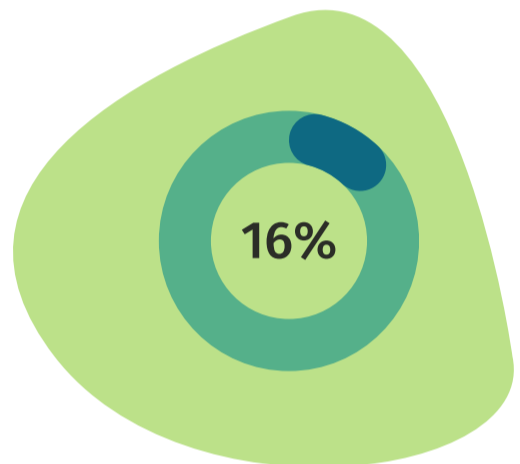
### Improved Financial Security

- **>1 in 5 (22%)** reported their financial security has improved since receiving food from Food for Life
- **>1 in 5 (21%)** reported since receiving food from Food for Life they were able to pay their bills on time
- **16%** reported being able to avoid overdue fees since receiving food from Food for Life



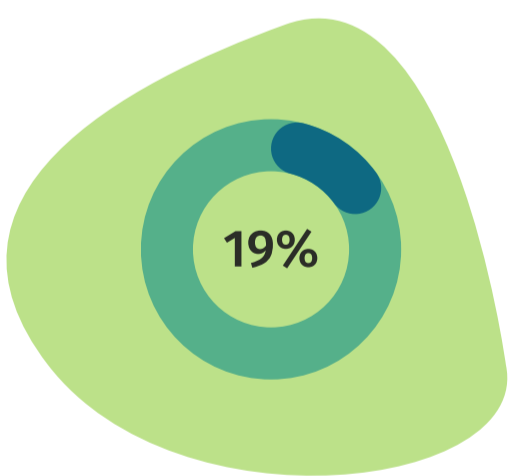
### Additional Money for Needed Food Items

**>1 in 3 (37%)** reported since receiving food from Food for Life they have additional money for purchasing other food items they need



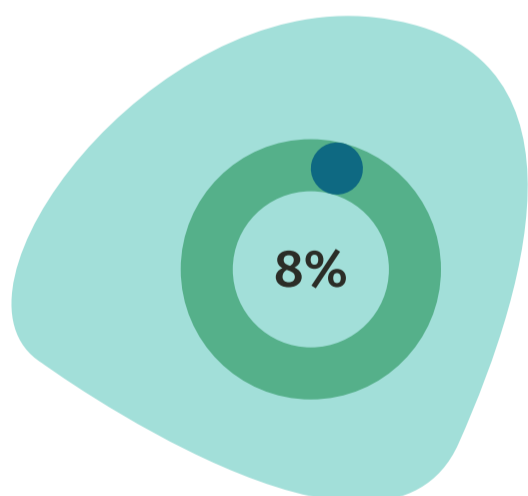
### Additional Money for Medications & Health Supports

**16%** reported having additional money to spend on medications and other health supports since receiving food from Food for Life



### Credit Card Interest

**19%** reported spending less on credit card interest since receiving food from Food for Life



### Pay-Day Loans

**8%** reported that since receiving food from Food for Life it has reduced their need to take out a pay-day loan

A payday loan costs \$17 for every \$100 that you borrow, which is the same as an annual interest rate of 442%. If payday loans are not paid back on time, it becomes easy to get stuck in a debt trap.

Source: Government of Canada (2023)

"Thanks to your program and support, my family is much more financially stable. We are able to pay our bills on time." - Neighbour

"We're grateful for the food that allows us to pay necessary bills. It improves our sense of well-being. Thank you." - Neighbour

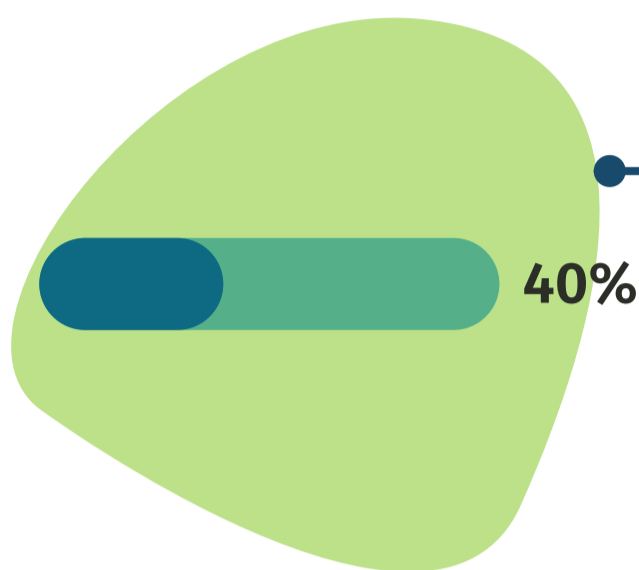
# Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



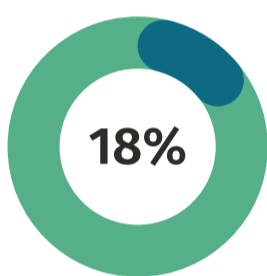
## Social Wellbeing Impacts

Improving a household's food security status through fresh food access enhances household cohesion, reduces stress and anxiety related to food, and strengthens community bonds for our neighbours through shared resources and support networks

### Stress & Wellbeing



- **>1 in 3 (40%)** reported that since receiving food from Food for Life it has decreased the amount of stress they feel in managing their household responsibilities
- **>1 in 4 (28%)** reported an increased overall sense of wellbeing since receiving food from Food for Life
- **1 in 5 (20%)** reported an increased ability to cope with stress since receiving food from Food for Life



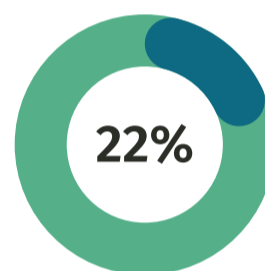
#### Improved Health Outcomes

**18%** reported improved health outcomes for themselves and/ or those they live with since receiving food from Food for Life



#### Improved Community Resource Knowledge

**1 in 5 (20%)** reported that since receiving food from Food for Life it has improved their awareness of other supports in their community and how they can access them

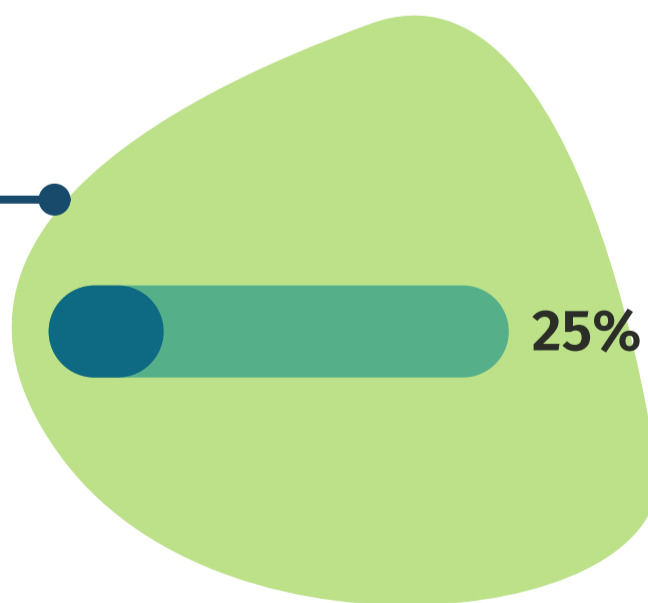


#### Increased Trust with Service Providers

**>1 in 5 (22%)** reported since receiving food from Food for Life it has increased their trust with social service providers

### Increased Community Wellbeing

- **1 in 4 (25%)** reported receiving food from Food for Life helped them to get to know the people in their community
- **19%** reported receiving food from Food for Life has increased the amount of social connections they have
- **14%** reported an increased sense of safety and wellbeing in their community since receiving food from Food for Life



"I would like to thank Food for Life for bringing me the secure feeling I've lost for awhile. I feel healthier physically and psychologically. Thank you."  
- Neighbour

"My stress levels have decreased more than I could have imagined - I still struggle financially but less and slowly it is getting better. Thank you for all you do." - Neighbour