

Neighbour Impact Survey Report 2024



Cultivating Community: Transforming Lives Through Rescued Food

At Food for Life, we believe that access to nourishing food is the foundation for building healthier, more resilient communities. Our mission extends beyond addressing hunger; we strive to create meaningful, lasting changes in our neighbours' lives by improving food insecurity outcomes and working to address systemic barriers like income instability.

Each week, our team of 18 staff and over 500 dedicated volunteers partners with more than 100 community programs across Halton and Hamilton to provide rescued, nutritious food to over 4,000 households. By redistributing over 4.6 million pounds of surplus food annually, we not only help alleviate hunger but also prevent 6 million kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions, aligning our work with environmental sustainability.

Through low-barrier food programs, we support our neighbours' food needs so they can focus on their health, financial stability, and social wellbeing without worrying where their next meal will come from. Access to fresh, nutritious food reduces financial stress, enhances diet quality, and fosters stronger community bonds. Our efforts mitigate reliance on low-cost, nutritionally poor foods, addressing chronic health issues and improving long-term outcomes for individuals and families.

In recent years, the rising cost of living has reshaped the demographics of those accessing our programs, revealing an alarming trend: a growing number of households with working individuals are struggling to meet their basic needs. This shift highlights how income instability, even among those who are employed is leaving households vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity.

We are proud to announce that in 2024 our impact work with our neighbours has been recognized for the first time by Charity Intelligence, naming Food for Life as one of Canada's Top 10 Impact Charities and Top 10 Impact: Canadian Food Banks for 2024. This honour reflects the positive impact we've achieved for our neighbours and society over the past year.

In 2024, we also began actively participating in advocacy efforts, amplifying our neighbours' voices to highlight the needs in our communities and push for federal policies that can create meaningful change. These initiatives align with our commitment to advocating for our neighbours in ways that respect their dignity and lived experiences.

We measure success not just by the pounds of food rescued or the number of people served but by the transformations in our neighbours' lives. Improved health outcomes, financial stability, and a sense of belonging are at the heart of our impact. This report highlights how food, as a fundamental human need, becomes a catalyst for lasting positive change.

This research is made possible thanks to the Gould Family, whose generous support drives our innovation and community impact. We also extend our gratitude to our neighbours, whose insights and feedback continue to guide and strengthen our work.

As you explore this report, we hope it deepens your understanding of the transformative role Food for Life plays in our community.

For questions or feedback, please reach out to Dianna Williams, Manager of Research, at Dianna@FoodForLife.ca.

Yours in community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Randell".

Karen Randell
Executive Director

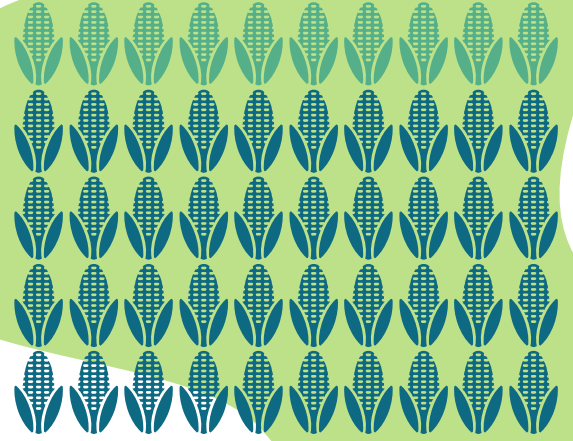
Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Food for Life gathered voluntary survey responses from the community members we serve - our 'neighbours' - to understand how our programs impact their food security, health, finances, and overall wellbeing

About the Survey

- **Impact survey** collected demographics and measured program outcomes
- **287 unique responses** collected between August-October, 2024 - **representing 12% (>1 in 10) of our total neighbour population** accessing Food for Life run programs (approx. 2400 active households during time of data collection)
- **Results represent 30 program locations** across Halton municipalities
- **Invitations to participate sent over email and through program visits** with survey information leaflets and posters at each program site
- Survey available in 7 languages to enhance representation of the diverse communities we serve



Impacts on Overall Health

92%

92% agreed that accessing food from Food for Life positively impacts their overall health

89%

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

72%

72% agreed that accessing food from Food for Life decreases their need to access additional food support programs

92%

92% agreed that receiving food from Food for Life increases their access to fresh and healthy food items

Dietary & Food Needs

96%

- **96%** reported the food they access from Food for Life is appropriate for their culture and/ or beliefs
- **89%** agreed that the food they access from Food for Life is appropriate for their dietary needs
- **76%** agreed that their Food for Life program has met their food needs
- **60%** reported dietary improvements since accessing food from Food for Life

Weekly Savings

- On average our neighbours reported they are saving **\$65.25** per week on groceries by accessing food from Food for Life programs (\$261/ month average if access weekly)
- Market programs (Mountainside & Tremaine) average higher at **\$72.09** per week, with many neighbours noting weekly savings of **\$100+**
- **59%** reported accessing Food for Life programs weekly, and **56%** indicated they do not use any other food programs outside of Food for Life

\$65.25

Average self-reported weekly savings per household across all program types

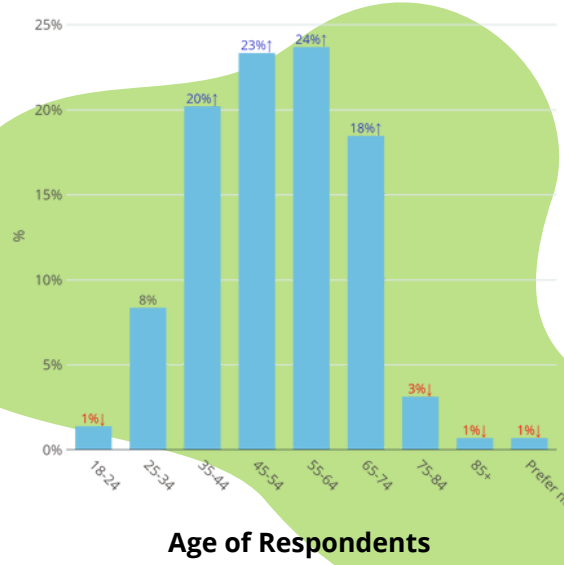
Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Neighbour Demographics

Age Group, Gender, Racial Identity, & Preferred Language

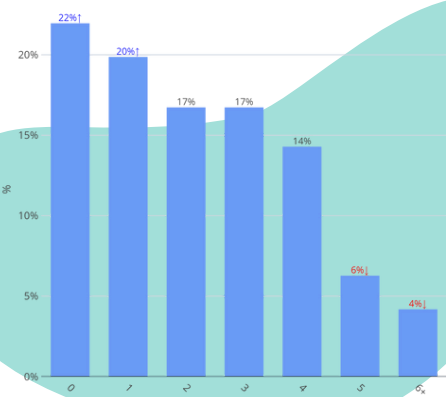
- The largest neighbour age ranges represented are the **55-64** age group (**24%**), followed by **45-54** (**23%**), **35-44** (**20%**), and **65-74** (**18%**)
- Most respondents (**75%**) identify as Woman/ Girl as their gender
- Over half (**63%**) identify as White/ Caucasian as their racial identity
- **6%** identify as a Person of Colour
- **5%** identify as Black
- **3%** identify as Indigenous
- **89%** selected English as their preferred language



Age of Respondents

Household Size & Dependents

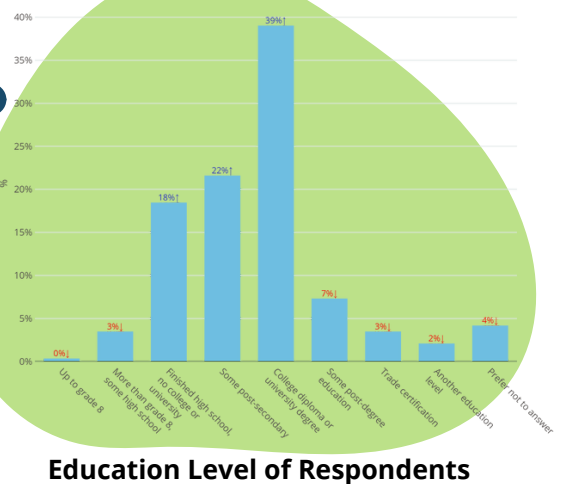
- Almost half of our neighbours reported living alone (**22%**) or with one other person (**20%**)
- Household sizes of five or more people were less common (**10%**)
- Average household size = **2.2 people**
- Average number of dependents = **0.9 people**



Household Size of Respondents

Education Level

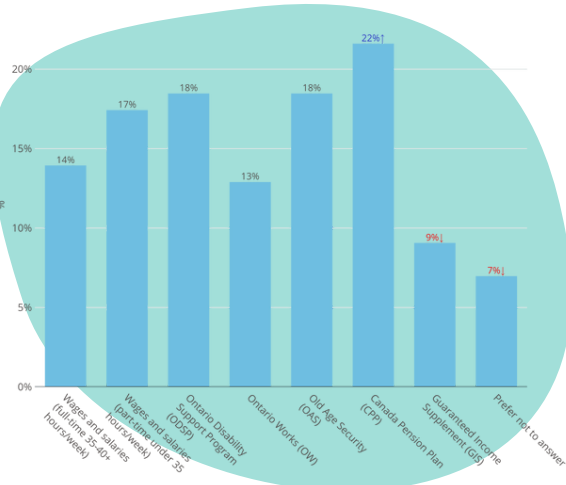
- **39%** reported having a college diploma or university degree
- **22%** reported having some post-secondary education
- **18%** reported finishing high school



Education Level of Respondents

Sources of Income

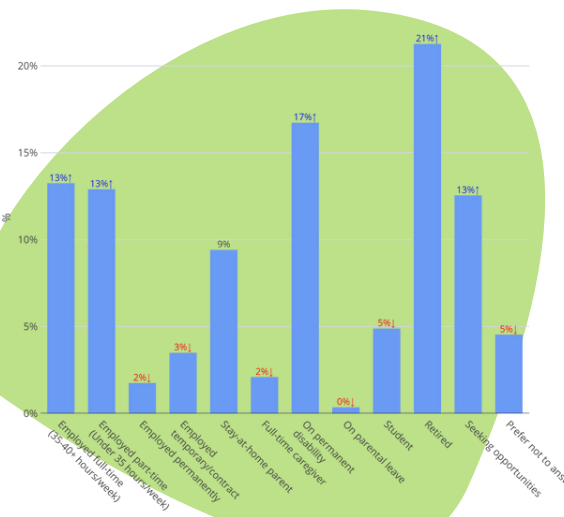
- Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (**22%**), Old Age Security (OAS) (**18%**), and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (**18%**) were the highest reported sources of income



Income Source of Respondents

Employment Status

- Retired (**21%**), On Permanent Disability (**17%**), Employed full-time (**13%**) or part-time (**13%**), and Seeking opportunities (**13%**) were the highest reported employment statuses
- **28%** of neighbours who have been accessing Food for Life programs for a year or less are employed



Employment Status of Respondents

Demographics by Program Type

- **Gender, Language, Racial Identity, Education, & Disability Status:** These characteristics were consistent across all program types, including Market, Community, and In-Building programs.
- **Age:** Market attendees predominantly fall between the ages of 35-64 (73%). Community program attendees represent a broad range of ages. In-Building attendees are primarily older adults, with 52% aged 65-84.
- **Household Size & Dependents:** In-Building attendees are more likely to live alone and less likely to have children or dependents compared to those attending Market and Community programs.
- **Employment Status & Income Source:** Market attendees are more likely to work full-time, with wages and salaries as their primary income source. Community attendees are most likely to rely on ODSP as their main source of income. In-Building attendees are predominantly retired, drawing income from CPP, OAS, and GIS.

Disability Status

40%

>1 in 3 (40%) consider themselves to be a person with a disability

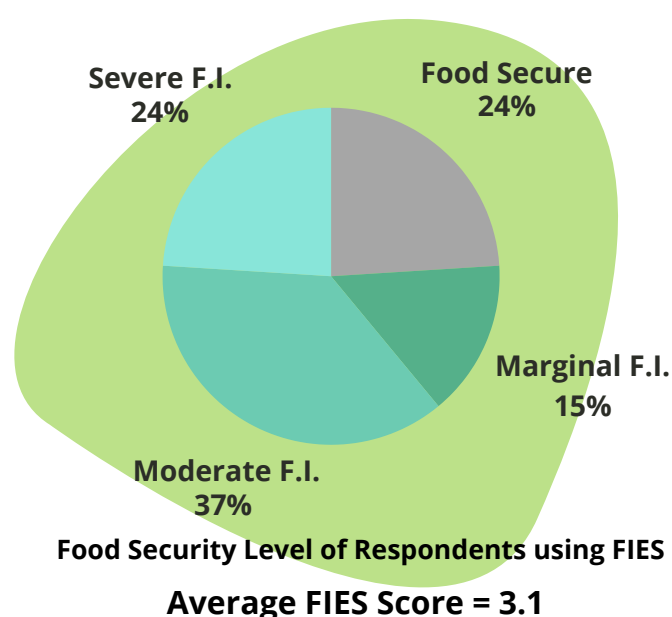
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Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

FIES Survey Module

The United Nations Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is a globally recognized, evidence-based, and validated 8-item survey module designed to measure self-reported experiences of household food insecurity



- **>1 in 3 (37%)** of those who responded are **moderately food insecure** and experience compromises in quality and quantity of food consumed
- **24%** are **food secure** and feel well-supported through food access, but are not necessarily income secure
- **24%** are **severely food insecure** and experience reduced food intake and missed meals
- **15%** 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 Dependent

At Food for Life, we understand that food insecurity is rooted in inadequate income. While many of our neighbours may be classified as "food secure", this often relies heavily on their continued access to food support programs. True food security goes beyond temporary stability—it requires adequate financial resources to consistently access food in socially and culturally appropriate ways without relying on external aid. This underscores the critical connection between financial security and achieving sustainable improvements to food insecurity.

Insights on Food Security Among Neighbours

- **Age:** Neighbours aged 45-54 are most prone to severe food insecurity, highlighting a critical need for targeted support during this life stage prior to enrollment in CPP. Those aged 35-44 are more likely to experience moderate food insecurity, while neighbours aged 65+ exhibit the highest levels of food security, reflecting stable retirement incomes like CPP.
- **Gender:** Neighbours identifying as women are more likely to be food secure, while men are disproportionately affected by moderate food insecurity.
- **Employment Status & Income Source:** Retired neighbours demonstrate the highest food security rates, due to consistent income streams like CPP, whereas those reporting permanent disability as their employment status are most affected by severe food insecurity. Neighbours relying on ODSP face the highest rates of severe food insecurity but also show significant improvement with access to consistent food support, transitioning from severe to marginal.
- **Disability:** Neighbours who identify as a person with a disability are more vulnerable to experiencing severe food insecurity but also exhibit a heightened responsiveness to food support, transitioning to improved food insecurity statuses with consistent access.
- **Budget:** Neighbours with no money left for food after paying bills are most likely to experience severe food insecurity. In contrast, households with a monthly food budget of \$201-\$400 after expenses are most likely to be food secure, underscoring the importance of financial stability in achieving adequate food access.
- **Diet Quality & Food Groups:** Self-reported poor or fair diet quality correlates strongly with severe food insecurity, while neighbours reporting good or very good diet quality are more likely to be food secure. Consistent access to diverse food groups, including fruits, vegetables, proteins, and grains, plays a vital role in food security outcomes and dietary improvements.
- **Program Engagement:** Market program attendees are more likely to experience severe food insecurity, while those accessing in-building programs show higher levels of food security. Weekly attendance at Food for Life programs correlates with being food secure, with neighbours attending for 6 months or more demonstrating significant positive changes in food quality and quantity consumed and movement towards improved food security outcomes.
- **Needed Community Supports:** Severely food insecure neighbours express greater need for childcare, recreation programs for children, mental health support, and information about additional food programs. Food secure neighbours often report that their needs are met through Food for Life services, indicating the effectiveness of existing supports.
- **Language, Racial Identity, Education Level, Household Size, & Children/Dependents:** No significant relationships found with food security.

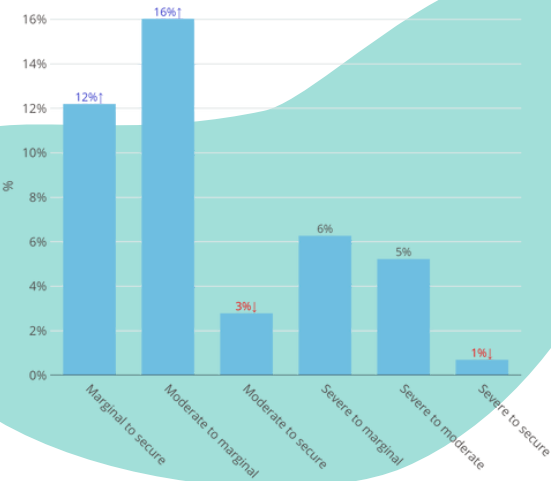
Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Health Impacts

Providing households with access to fresh food improves food security, alleviates stress, enhances diet quality and nutrition, and promotes overall health and wellbeing for our neighbours

Improvements to Food Insecurity



Level of Food Insecurity Improvement of Respondents

Nearly 1 in 2 (43%) of those who responded have experienced positive changes to their food insecurity status since accessing food from a Food for Life program

- 124 unique households, impacting 395 individuals
- 299 unique individuals over 18
- 96 unique individuals under 18
- Movement from moderate to marginal (16%) and marginal to secure (12%) were the highest reported levels of improvement

"I can eat a lot more fresh fruits and vegetables. I am diabetic and it is an enormous help." - Neighbour

Enhancing food security not only drives positive change at the household level but also generates broader societal benefits and significant cost savings

Healthcare Savings

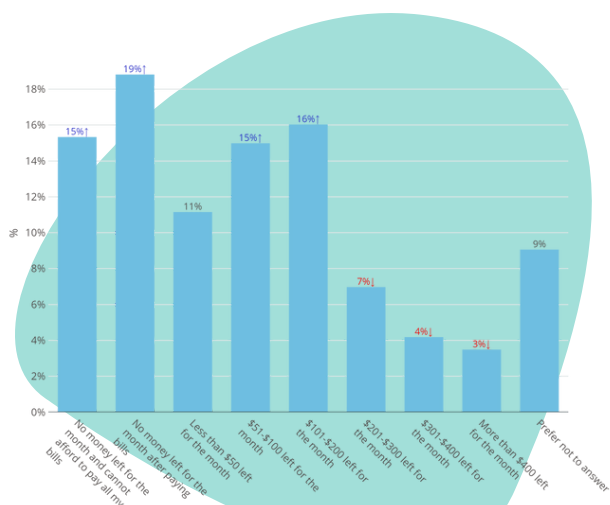
\$171,225.30 for 2024 for 124 households

- 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 low barrier fresh food support, there are improvements to food insecurity status resulting in healthcare savings through decreased healthcare service utilization and reduction of long-term chronic disease risk and improved chronic disease outcomes
- In 2024, Food for Life programs have contributed to \$171,225.30 in healthcare savings to our local health infrastructure for the households who responded and experienced improvements to their food insecurity 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 2024 costs by adding a 2% increase from 2023 values. 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

No money left for food after paying bills (19%), \$101-\$200 left for food (16%), and \$51-\$100 left for food (15%) were the highest reported amounts left for a monthly food budget after paying other necessary expenses

Food for Life programs help bridge the monthly gap for neighbours whose food budgets fall short of meeting their household's needs after covering other expenses

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

\$1,788/ month Average rent in Halton (Halton Region State of Housing Report 2023)

*Awaiting 2024 Data Release. Source: Halton Region (2023)

"Access to weekly vegetables has helped me to eat healthier, instead of doing without." - Neighbour

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Financial Impacts

Enhancing a household's food security through access to fresh food allows neighbours to allocate limited income to other essential expenses, avoid incurring additional debt, and work toward greater financial stability

Improved Financial Security

Our neighbours experience improved financial security since accessing food from Food for Life:

- **Almost 1 in 4 (24%)** reported their financial security has improved
- **>1 in 5 (21%)** reported they were able to pay their bills on time
- **12%** reported being able to avoid overdue fees

24%

36%

Additional Money for Needed Food Items

>1 in 3 (36%) reported since accessing food from Food for Life they have additional money for purchasing other food items they need

16%

Additional Money for Medications & Health Supports

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

17%

Credit Card Interest

17% reported spending less on credit card interest since accessing food from Food for Life

11%

Household Wellbeing

11% reported that since accessing food from Food for Life it has allowed them to participate in wellbeing activities

Access to fresh food support from Food for Life helps to promote financial security, improve our neighbours ability to support their own health, and enable households to reallocate resources toward activities that enhance overall wellbeing, such as recreation, education, and personal wellness, fostering a more balanced and fulfilling quality of life

\$17.20/
hour

Minimum wage
in Ontario
(Oct. 2024)

\$26/
hour

Living wage
in Halton
(OLWN 2024)



Many minimum-wage workers in Halton struggle to afford the actual cost of living in the area, often cutting food—an adjustable expense—to prioritize housing, utilities, and other essentials, increasing their risk of food insecurity

"It gives peace of mind that there will be food, as my ODSP allowance goes to my medicines and medical needs that OHIP and ODSP do not cover." - Neighbour

"Provides the food security that's crucial to keeping mental health in check, reducing stress and allowing us to focus the energy toward finding a job, self-care, bills, rent, education and sports for kids, and the ability to pay for transportation or gas to go places." - Neighbour

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Social Wellbeing Impacts

Increasing food security through access to fresh food fosters stronger household unity, alleviates food-related stress and anxiety, and deepens community connections by promoting shared resources and support networks

Stress & Wellbeing

44%

- **Nearly 1 in 2 (44%)** reported that since accessing food from Food for Life it has decreased the amount of stress they feel in managing their household responsibilities
- **>1 in 4 (27%)** reported an increased overall sense of wellbeing since accessing food from Food for Life
- **1 in 5 (20%)** reported an increased ability to cope with stress since accessing food from Food for Life

24%

Improved Health Outcomes

>1 in 5 (24%) reported improved health outcomes for themselves and/ or those they live with since accessing food from Food for Life

18%

Improved Community Resource Knowledge

18% reported that since accessing food from Food for Life it has improved their awareness of other supports in their community and how they can access them

22%

Increased Trust with Service Providers

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

"I was very scared to go at first. But staff and volunteers made me feel very at ease. I am young. Mother of 2. I feel awkward going at first but everyone was genuinely very nice and accepting." - Neighbour

Increased Community Wellbeing

- **>1 in 5 (24%)** reported accessing food from Food for Life helped them to get to know the people in their community
- **19%** reported accessing food from Food for Life has increased the amount of social connections they have
- **16%** reported an increased sense of safety and wellbeing in their community since accessing food from Food for Life

24%

"It strengthens my belief that we are all equal, no matter our colour, creed or race, food and love is all we need to build a great community." - Neighbour

"I never feel ashamed to go get the food because the volunteers are always so cheerful and compassionate. Staff are also very welcoming. I am very isolated and this one hour out is a positive time for me." - Neighbour