

Neighbour Impact Survey Report

2025



30 Years of Nourishing Our Community: Stabilizing Households and Transforming Lives Through Rescued Food

2025 marks Food for Life's 30th anniversary – three decades of rescuing surplus food and turning it into meaningful impact for our neighbours across Halton and Hamilton. This year, we've rescued 96% more dairy, increased average pounds rescued per pickup, and delivered more food to program sites than ever before. We also launched four new programs and partnerships, ensuring that no neighbour is left behind.

At Food for Life, we measure impact not just by pounds of food distributed or people served, but by the positive changes we see in our neighbours' health, financial stability, and social wellbeing. While our data is reported in percentages, the true measure of success lies in the stability, dignity, and improved quality of life that access to fresh food creates.

The economic landscape remains complex. Rising costs of living, high rates of unemployment, income instability, and uncertainty from tariffs and global markets are creating additional pressures for our neighbours. Persistent housing challenges add further strain – with long waitlists for subsidized units, limited affordable market rental options, and many households spending more than 30% of their income on housing, placing them at moderate risk of homelessness. In response, we are not only providing food but also connecting neighbours to resources and supports through partnerships and program visits that help meet broader needs – recognizing that it takes the full social service sector working together to address food insecurity.

Our low-barrier, no proof of poverty approach allows neighbours to access programs as soon as they begin experiencing food insecurity. Data shows this is the moment with the greatest opportunity to improve outcomes – helping households strengthen their resilience before hardship worsens. This year, our programs have continued to stabilize households, particularly those experiencing marginal food insecurity. While not fully food secure, these neighbours consistently have enough food to eat, protecting them from skipping meals, malnutrition, and the long-term health impacts of deeper food insecurity.

Across our sample, 36% of households experienced improved food security, while another 57% remained stable, most in the marginal category. These outcomes reflect the reality that while fewer households are moving to full food security in today's economy, Food for Life's programs are preventing worsening experiences and supporting long-term health and wellbeing.

We are deeply grateful to our neighbours and community partners, whose insights and lived experiences continue to shape and strengthen our work and amplify our collective impact in the community.

As we celebrate 30 years of rescuing food and impacting lives, the story of Food for Life is one of resilience, innovation, and community. From stabilizing households in times of economic uncertainty to expanding programs that reach more neighbours than ever, our work demonstrates the power of collective action. Every rescued pound, every program, and every connection strengthens households, supports wellbeing, and prevents deeper food insecurity. Together with our partners, volunteers, and generous donors and supporters, we continue to build a community where everyone has access to the food, nutrition, and support they need to thrive.

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 collected voluntary responses from neighbours to understand how our programs impact their food security, health, finances, and wellbeing

About the Survey

- **Impact survey** collected demographics and measured program outcomes
- **338 unique responses** collected (June-August 2025), representing **15% (>1 in 6) of neighbours** accessing Food for Life run programs (~2200 active households)
- **Results represent 31 program locations** across Halton municipalities (of 38 locations invited to participate)
- **Invitations to participate sent over email and through program visits** with survey information leaflets, posters, and paper surveys at program sites
- **Survey available in top 7 languages** of our neighbours to reflect the diversity of our communities

1 in 6

Neighbours Represented



91%

Impacts on Overall Health

91% agreed that accessing food from Food for Life positively impacts their overall health

86%

86% agreed that accessing food from Food for Life helps them to stretch their budget so they have money for bills and other necessary expenses

68%

68% agreed that accessing food from Food for Life decreases their need to access additional food support programs

90%

90% agreed that receiving food from Food for Life increases their access to fresh and healthy food items

96%

Dietary & Food Needs

- **96%** reported the food they access from Food for Life is appropriate for their culture and/ or beliefs
- **88%** agreed that the food they access from Food for Life is appropriate for their dietary needs
- **84%** are satisfied with the quality of food they receive from Food for Life programs and **60%** agreed that the amount of food they receive meets their household's food needs
- **56%** reported dietary improvements since accessing food from Food for Life

Weekly Savings

- On average our neighbours reported they are saving **\$73.93** per week on groceries by accessing food from Food for Life programs (\$296/ month average if access weekly)
- Market programs (Mountainside & Tremaine - 53% of sample) average higher at **\$78.92** per week, with **36%** of market program neighbours noting weekly savings of **\$100+**
- **58%** reported accessing Food for Life programs weekly, and **55%** indicated they do not use additional food programs outside of Food for Life
- **76%** reported they receive enough food from Food for Life programs for 2-5 days per week

\$73.93

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

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses

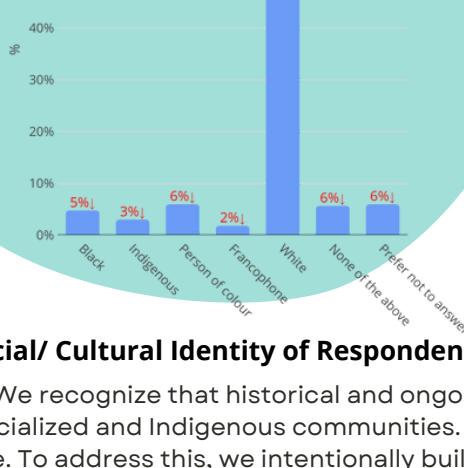
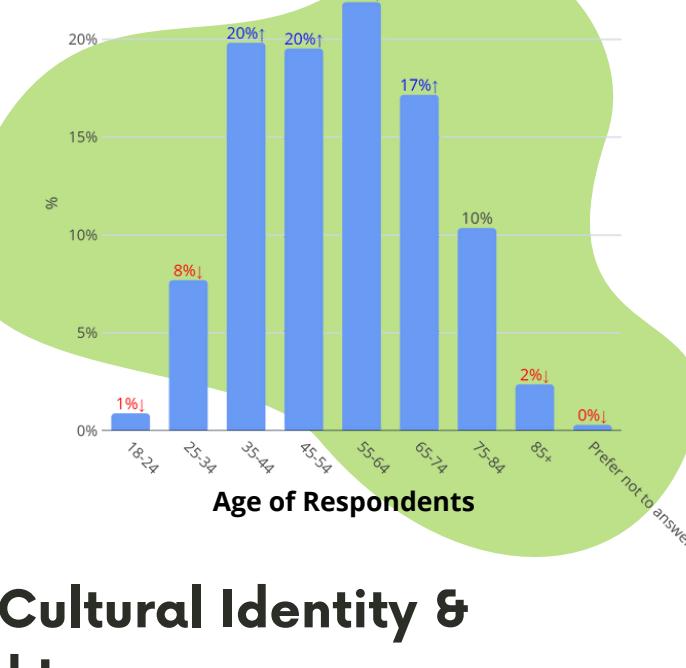


Neighbour Demographics

Age Group & Gender

- The largest neighbour age ranges represented are the **55-64** age group (**22%**), followed by **45-54** (**20%**), **35-44** (**20%**), and **65-74** (**17%**)
- Most respondents (**75%**) identify as Woman or Girl as their gender

*Gender identity question included non-binary and other options; no respondents selected these categories

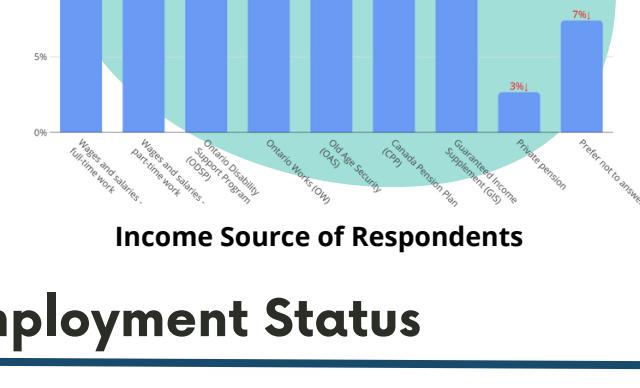
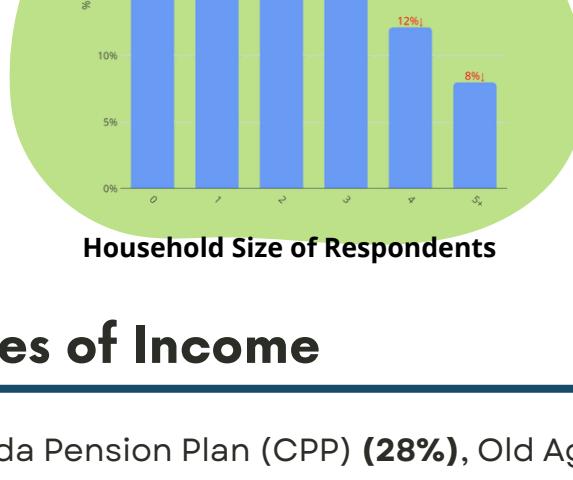


Racial/ Cultural Identity of Respondents

*We recognize that historical and ongoing injustices have led to understandable mistrust in research among some racialized and Indigenous communities. As a result, participation rates may not fully reflect the diversity of those we serve. To address this, we intentionally build partnerships with organizations supporting these communities, honour lived experiences, and provide ongoing anti-racism and anti-oppression training for our team and volunteers – while recognizing that we, and the broader community, still have work to do to advance equity and trust.

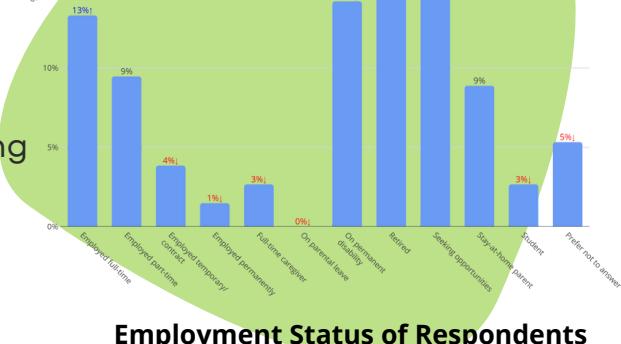
Household Size & Dependents

- Almost half of our neighbours reported living alone (**26%**) or with one other person (**19%**)
- Household sizes of five or more people were less common (**8%**)
- Average household size = **1.99 people**
- Average number of dependents = **0.75 people**



Sources of Income

- Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (**28%**), Old Age Security (OAS) (**24%**), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (**16%**), Ontario Works (**16%**), and Wages and salaries from full-time work (**15%**) were the highest reported sources of income



Demographics by Program Type

- Language:** Fridge and Community program attendees are most likely to prefer a language other than English.
- Age:** Market attendees are mostly 35-64 (69%). In-Building attendees are primarily 65+ (73%), Fridge 65-74 (42%), Home delivery 35-44 (57%). Community programs serve a broad age range.
- Household Size & Dependents:** Programs providing more pounds of food per visit (Market, Home Delivery, Community) tend to serve larger households and more families with children or dependents, while In-Building and Fridge programs primarily serve individuals or adult-only households.
- Employment Status & Income Source:** Market attendees are more likely employed full-time with wages/salaries. Home delivery recipients report higher rates of permanent disability and Ontario Works. In-Building attendees are mostly retired, indicating CPP, OAS, and GIS.
- Program Engagement:** No clear relationship with neighbours, reported amounts of food received based on program type, though attendance patterns differ: in-building (weekly, long-term), community and market (2-4x monthly, short-term), fridge (short-term, sporadic).

Disability Status

40%

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

*Nationally, food insecurity rates are more than twice as high among people with disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2021)

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

Understanding and Measuring Food Insecurity

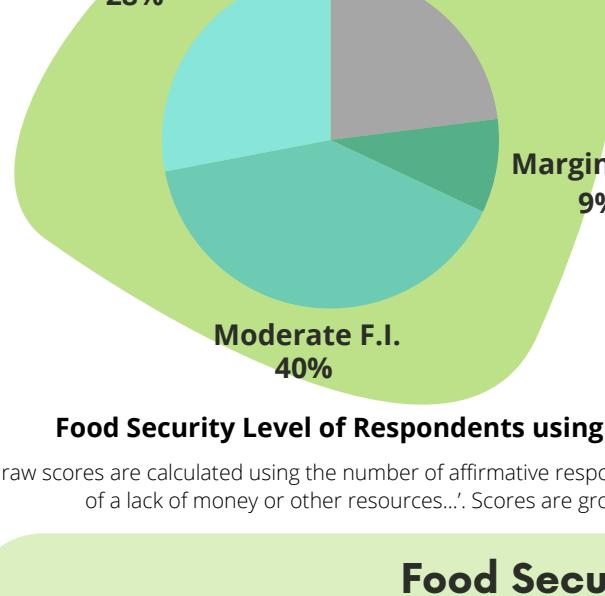
Food for Life uses the United Nations Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) – a globally recognized, evidence-based 8-item survey tool – to understand neighbours' self-reported experiences with food access and affordability

The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) measures food insecurity across four levels:

- **Food Secure:** Households consistently have access to enough of the foods they want and need, without needing to use coping strategies to obtain food*
- **Marginal:** Enough food is usually available, but not always the kinds or quality needed
- **Moderate:** Food quality or quantity is often compromised – meals are stretched, and preferred foods skipped
- **Severe:** Food runs out, meals are missed, and hunger becomes a regular reality**

*True food security means having sufficient and reliable income to purchase food independently

**Severely food insecure neighbours were most likely to report needing information on additional food programs, financial supports, and mental health services – reflecting the link between financial strain, food access, and wellbeing



Food Security Level of Respondents using FIES

- >1 in 3 (40%) of those who responded are **moderately food insecure** and experience compromises in quality and quantity of food consumed
- 28% are **severely food insecure** and experience reduced food intake and missed meals
- 23% are **food secure** and feel well-supported through food access, but are not necessarily income secure
- 9% are **marginally food insecure**, often having enough food but not always the kinds they need

*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 recognize that food insecurity is rooted in inadequate income, not just food access. Many neighbours classified as "food secure" remain support dependent, relying on ongoing food programs to make ends meet.

Insights on Food Security Among Neighbours

Average FIES Score = 3.5

Secure
(23% n=79)

Marginal
(9% n=31)

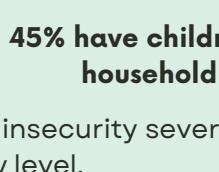
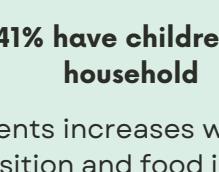
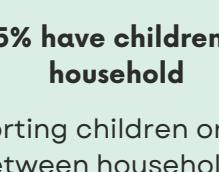
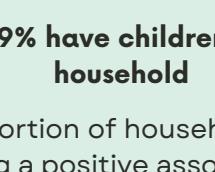
Moderate
(40% n=134)

Severe
(28% n=94)

Age



- Neighbours aged 75+ are most likely to be food secure, whereas neighbours aged 45-54 experience the highest rates of severe food insecurity. Neighbours 65+ experienced the most stability in their food security over time.



29% have children in household

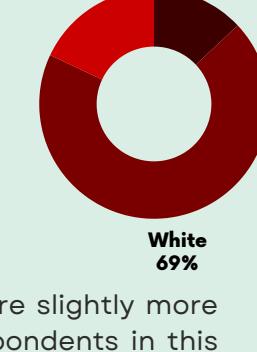
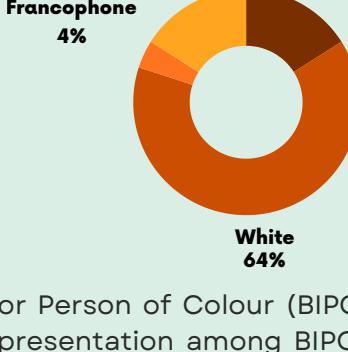
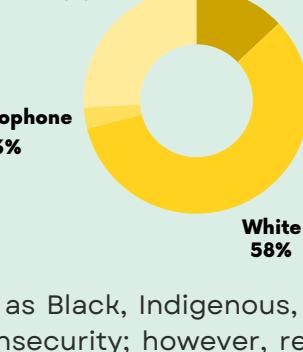
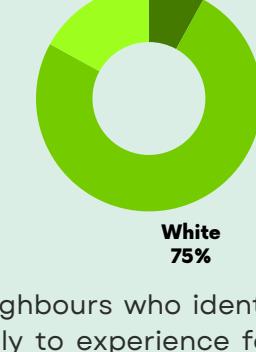
35% have children in household

41% have children in household

45% have children in household

Children/
Dependents

Race/
Cultural
Identity



- Neighbours who identified as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Colour (BIPOC) were slightly more likely to experience food insecurity; however, representation among BIPOC respondents in this survey was limited and findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size.

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

Insights on Food Security Among Neighbours

Average FIES Score = 3.5

Secure (23% n=79)



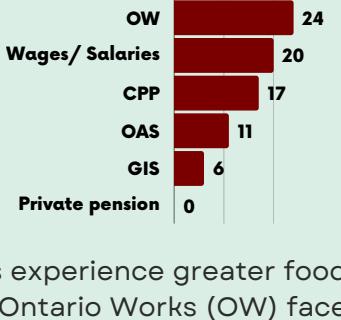
Marginal (9% n=31)



Moderate (40% n=134)



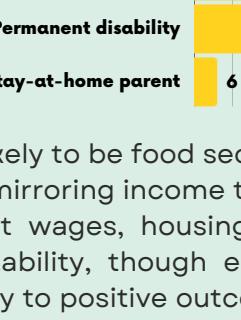
Severe (28% n=94)



Income Source (%)

- Neighbours receiving Canada Pension Plan (CPP) or Old Age Security (OAS) benefits experience greater food security. In contrast, those relying on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works (OW) face the highest rates of severe food insecurity, though ODSP recipients show a heightened responsiveness to improved outcomes through consistent food support. Neighbours indicating retirement benefits (CPP, OAS, GIS) were most likely to experience long-term stability with their food security, a trend largely supported by many older adults' access to affordable or long-term housing that helps keep living costs manageable.

Employment Status (%)



- Retired neighbours were most likely to be food secure, while those on permanent disability faced the highest rates of severe food insecurity, mirroring income trends. Being employed showed little relationship with food security status, suggesting that wages, housing costs, and other essential expenses all play a role in determining household food stability, though employed neighbours and those on permanent disability demonstrate improved sensitivity to positive outcomes through consistent food support. Retired neighbours experience the most long-term stability with their food security.

Disability Status



23% have a disability



35% have a disability



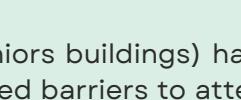
42% have a disability



54% have a disability

- Disability is strongly linked to higher rates and worsening experiences of food insecurity, indicating that current supports and benefits are not meeting needs, while often higher living costs and systemic barriers compound challenges with food access. Neighbours who have a disability are most likely to report transitioning from severe food insecurity to improved statuses through consistent food support.

Program Type



- In-building programs (predominately in Halton Housing Seniors buildings) have the strongest relationship to food security, likely reflecting reliable weekly access, reduced barriers to attendance, and affordable, geared to income rents. Market-style programs serve the most severely food insecure neighbours, providing the largest amount of food and choice, while community programs help stabilize marginally food insecure households with adequate food access - showing how program models work to meet different needs.

Visit Frequency



65% access Food for Life programs weekly



58% access Food for Life programs weekly



57% access Food for Life programs weekly



54% access Food for Life programs weekly

- Weekly participation in Food for Life programs is modestly linked (+3-11%) to better food security outcomes reflecting the benefits of regular and reliable food support. Programs are designed to promote low-barrier weekly access for all neighbours, though barriers such as transportation, health, and scheduling challenges may still limit participation.



53% experienced dietary improvements since accessing Food for Life



68% experienced dietary improvements since accessing Food for Life



55% experienced dietary improvements since accessing Food for Life



54% experienced dietary improvements since accessing Food for Life

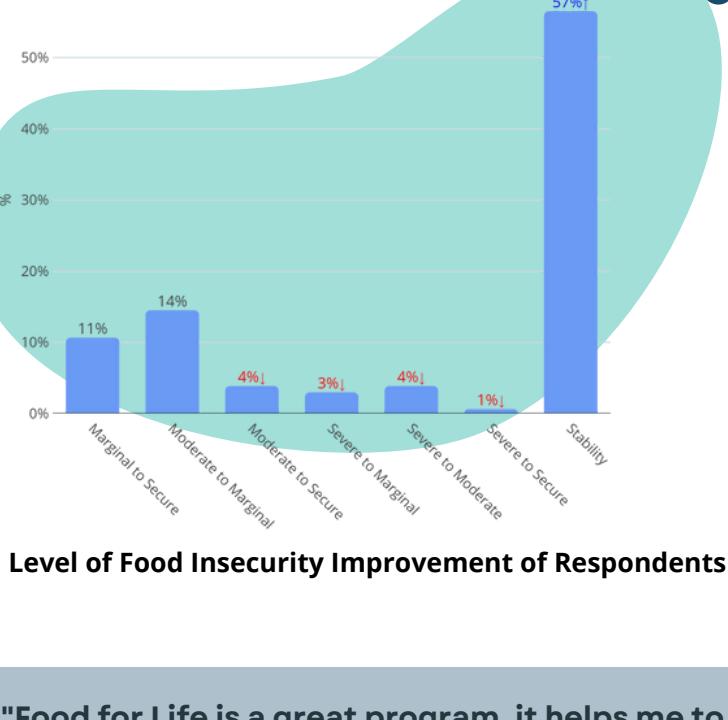
- Food for Life programs help households improve their diet quality - especially those marginally food insecure - to maintain adequate nutrition and stabilize their access to food, improving health and well-being even when full food security isn't reached.

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Health Impacts

Access to fresh food supports nutrition, wellbeing, and food security – in today's challenging economic climate, Food for Life programs are helping households stay stable and strengthen or maintain their food security for the future



Level of Food Insecurity Improvement of Respondents

Improvement & Stabilization

>1 in 3 (36%) of those who responded experienced improvements to their household's food insecurity status since accessing food from a Food for Life program

57% experienced stability and avoided worsening food insecurity, with 36% of these neighbours maintaining marginal food insecurity status - having enough food quantity, but not always the types most needed

- 123 unique households experienced improvement, impacting 343 individuals
- Movement from moderate to marginal (14%) and marginal to secure (11%) were the highest reported levels of improvement

"Food for Life is a great program, it helps me to find good nutritional food and helps me not starve, before I joined the program I used to eat once a day and I was always hungry." - Neighbour

Improving food security strengthens households and delivers lasting social and economic benefits

Healthcare Savings

\$166,714.55 for 2025 for 123 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 2025, **Food for Life programs have contributed to \$166,714.55 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 cost estimates have been adjusted to 2025 dollars using an estimated annual inflation rate of 2.0%, based on mid-2025 Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from Statistics Canada (1.7%-1.9%). Statements in this report do not reflect the interests of PROOF Research's top-down policy-driven approach to reducing food insecurity.

"[Food for Life] has improved my diet enormously ... I am diabetic insulin-dependent, so it is very good for helping me manage my illness." - Neighbour

Monthly Food Budget



\$51-\$100 left for food (19%), No money left for food after paying bills (17%), and No money left and cannot afford to pay all bills (16%) were the highest reported amounts left for a monthly food budget after paying other necessary expenses

With 77% of neighbours having just \$0-\$200 left for food after other expenses, Food for Life helps bridge the gap so households can meet their monthly food needs

Family of four household Nutritious Food Basket cost in 2024 - \$1,162 / month

*Awaiting 2025 Data Release for nutritious food basket. Source: Halton Region (2024)

\$1,900 / month Average rent in Halton for 1-bedroom

Source: Halton Region's Housing Strategy (2025)

Households should spend no more than 30% of income on housing costs – but with today's rent and housing prices, most households far exceed that, leaving little room for other essentials

"30% Rule" Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

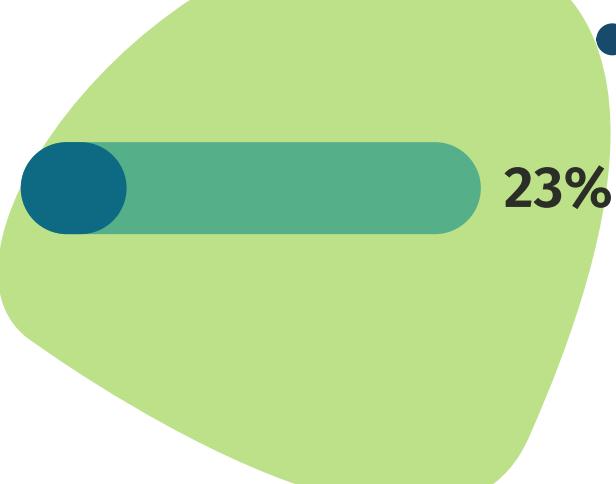
"Food for Life has provided me with vegetables that I otherwise wouldn't be able to access with the current food prices. I am still struggling with my monthly budget, but the food program has enabled us to eat healthy items most weeks." - Neighbour

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Financial Impacts

Strengthening household food security through access to fresh food enables neighbours to allocate limited income toward essential expenses, reduce the likelihood of taking on additional debt, and improve overall financial stability



Improved Financial Security

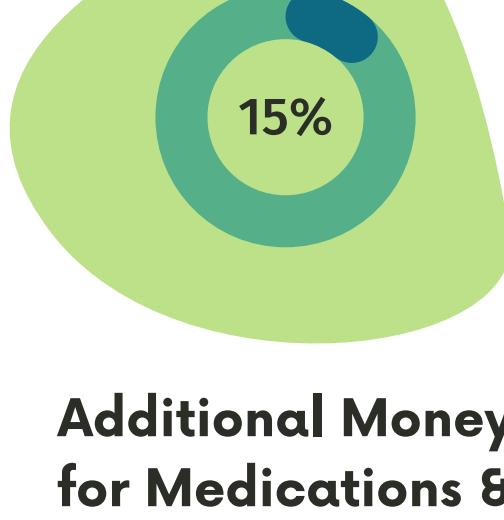
Our neighbours experience improved financial security since accessing food from Food for Life:

- **Almost 1 in 4 (23%)** reported their financial security has improved
- **18%** reported they were able to pay their bills on time
- **13%** reported being able to avoid overdue fees
- **6%** reported reduced need to take out pay day loans



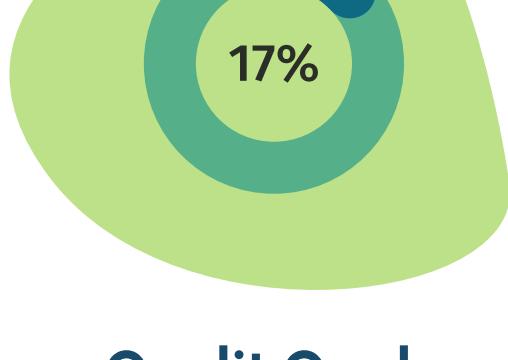
Additional Money for Needed Food Items

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



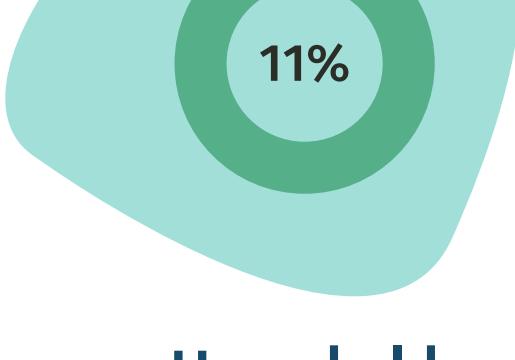
Additional Money for Medications & Health Supports

15% reported having additional money to spend on medications and other health supports since accessing food from Food for Life



Credit Card Interest

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



Household Wellbeing

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

Support from Food for Life helps neighbours stretch their budgets and protect their financial wellbeing. While rising costs of living mean fewer households can reallocate food savings toward other needs, many still report improved ability to pay bills on time, purchase other essential foods, and afford medications and health supports – helping to ease daily pressures and promote stability.

\$17.60/ hour
Minimum wage in Ontario (Oct. 2025)

\$27.20/ hour
Living wage in Halton (OLWN 2025)



Many minimum-wage workers in Halton can't afford the local cost of living, often cutting food to cover other essentials. A living yearly income in Halton ranges from over \$85K for a single person to over \$170K for a family of four.

"Accessing Food for Life has allowed me to pay off credit card debt for the first time in my adult life." - Neighbour

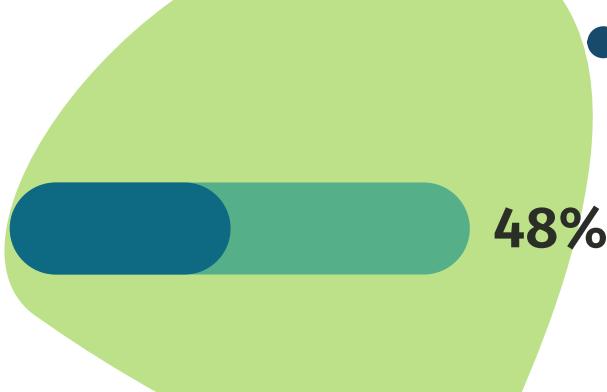
"Your help eases our financial burden and gives us peace of mind knowing we can count on high-quality food." - Neighbour

Neighbour Impact Survey Responses



Social Wellbeing Impacts

Access to fresh food through Food for Life programs supports overall wellbeing by reducing stress, improving mental and physical health, building trust in community supports, and strengthening connections that enhance community safety and belonging



Stress & Wellbeing

- **Nearly 1 in 2 (48%)** 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 (28%)** reported an increased overall sense of wellbeing since accessing food from Food for Life
- **>1 in 5 (22%)** reported improved mental health for themselves and/ or those they live with since accessing Food for Life programs



Improved Health Outcomes

>1 in 5 (22%) reported improved physical health for themselves and/ or those they live with since accessing food from Food for Life



Improved Community Resource Knowledge

19% 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



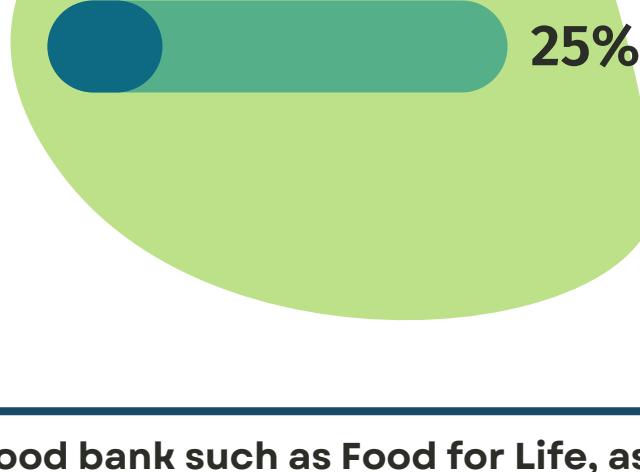
Increased Trust with Service Providers

>1 in 5 (21%) reported since accessing food from Food for Life it has increased their trust with social service providers

"My health is better for accessing help from Food for Life, I can eat a lot better food like fruits and vegetables. I am very grateful to have such a wonderful help because food has become very expensive." - Neighbour

Increased Community Wellbeing

- **1 in 4 (25%)** reported accessing food from Food for Life helped them to get to know the people in their community
- **23%** reported accessing food from Food for Life has increased the amount of social interactions they have
- **12%** reported an increased sense of safety and wellbeing in their community since accessing food from Food for Life



"I'm very grateful to have access to a food bank such as Food for Life, as unfortunately in today's time even having a full-time job doesn't make it easy to afford basic necessities. Food for Life has made it easier to have healthy meals with fresh produce." - Neighbour

"Living where I have no one to rely on, the reassurance that there is support available if I ever run out of food gives me comfort and strength." - Neighbour