



Myaha Tripp waits for her mother to come out of Bridge Street United Church in downtown Belleville with her frozen meals. Meals are given out from the foyer of the church every Friday, as part of the food aid programs that the church runs throughout the year.

Faces of Hunger:

Food Security in Prince Edward County

Photos and Story by James Wood

When someone first arrives in the city of Belleville, it looks like any other part of southern Ontario. A belt of farms surround sthe city. During harvest time you can see combines collecting from fields along Moira Street and Wallbridge-Loyalist Road

The cities farmers market takes place in front of City Hall four times a week, with farmers from around the region displaying fresh produce and meat.

With all this food on display, you wouldn't think that 10 percent of the local population can't afford to eat properly.

To understand food security, you must know what it means. Food security is having steady and stable access to healthy food. Food insecurity is the lack of steady access, which can lead to poor health.

With that in mind, it is shocking to learn that Hastings and Prince Edward counties have the highest rate of food insecurity.

"The root causes of food insecurity really go back to the resources available to the families" said Dr. Ian Sutherland, one of three co-coordinators of Inn From the Cold, a meal program that delivers substantial food aid to the community.

"To be more specific, the amount of money they have," said Sutherland.

Low income families will often spend the money they have on living costs such as rent and bills, before buying food.

A study done in 2011 by the Prince Edward and Hastings Health Unit found that basic living expenses came before quality food choices. The study found the cost to feed a family of four was \$178 a week, or \$770 a month. A family of four with two average incomes spends about 16 percent of its income on food.

Sylvianne Baraly eats in the gym of the Bridge Street United Church, during the free dinner put on by Inn From the Cold, a food aid group based out of the building. Baraly regularly uses food services around Belleville, and enjoys coming to Inn From the Cold for the friendly atmosphere and good food.



A family of four with only one source of income needs to spend about 29 per cent of their income on food. A family of four receiving money from Ontario Works, the provincial social assistance program, however, needs to spend about 38 per cent of their income on food to maintain a basic nutritious diet.

Food prices have risen by more than 30 percent since 2000, making living situations for lower income families and individuals more difficult.

What does this all come back to?

"Monetary reasons for one", said Steve Fralick, who uses the many meal services at Bridge Street United Church. Fralick, 56, is a resident of Belleville and lives in supported housing. He has a monthly income of 850 dollars a month, with 500 of that amount going straight towards the rent for his apartment in downtown Belleville. He shares rent with a roommate, whom he rarely sees, and the rest of his income is used to buy groceries, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Fralick tries to avoid relying on food aid. "I try not to use them too much but some months are tighter than others".

There are four cupboards in his kitchen. Two are for communal items, two are for food, one for each roommate. Fralick's cupboard is sparse, with soups, spreads and canned goods taking up most of the space.

"That's what I'm supposed to live off for the month,".

Fralick said he borrows from his friends when he is low on food, but gets caught owing them, and has to worry about paying them off next month when he receives his next cheques. "It's a vicious cycle".



Brenda Ross recieves her meal from volunteers at Bridge Street United Church, given out as part of the food aid program run from the church.



John Serson watches as a volunteer picks up a frozen meal. Serson regularly uses food aid services in Belleville to keep him and his mother fed and healthy.



Ken McClarence leans in close to examine the frozen meals being offered at Bridge Street United Church. McClarence and his roommate will often use food aid services in Belleville, as they cannot afford to buy groceries on a regular basis.