

focus on



Durham's Vital Signs® Report



Durham Community Foundation



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg inhabited these lands for thousands of years before colonization. Durham Community Foundation respects these lands are the traditional and treaty territories of the Nations covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama.

Durham Community Foundation honours the privilege to live on these lands. We recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and stewards of these lands and waters.

Participating in reconciliation, we commit to continuing to learn from Indigenous values and knowledge, collaborate, and celebrate our human connection. We shall continue to build meaningful relationships and explore new opportunities to support healing and reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Durham.

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Thank You for Your Wisdom

Durham Community Foundation is grateful for the support of many individuals and organizations that contributed to this report. All opinions and interpretations in this report are the opinions, interpretations, or perspectives of the editor and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any organizations or people we acknowledge here.



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Additional Organizations Consulted

To the many individuals who provided data, feedback, edits, perspectives and opinions, and helped us access research, thank you for your expertise. Your input was crucial to the quality of this report.

In particular, the organizations in Feed the Need in Durham's network of community food programs who took time to provide their valuable insights:

Abundant Life Gospel Centre
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AIDS Committee of Durham Region
All Saints' Anglican Church
Back Door Mission
Bethesda House
Bowmanville High School
Brock Community Food Bank
Canadian Mental Health Association of Durham
Carea Oshawa/Ajax
Christian Faith Outreach Centre
Christian Life Centre
Clarington Central Intermediate Secondary School
Columbus Community United Church
Cornerstone Community Association of Durham
Do Unto Others (DUO)
Durham Alliance Outreach
Durham Alternative Secondary School
Durham College Student Association
Durham Continuing Education
Durham District School Board
Durham Family Court Clinic
Durham Outlook for the Needy
Durham Youth Services (Joanne's House)
Eastdale CVI

Family Worship and Outreach Centre
Gate 3:16
GL Roberts
Herizon House
John Howard Society
Kendalwood SDA Food Bank
Knox Church Oshawa
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Muslim Welfare Home
New Life Neighborhood Centre
The Nourish and Develop Foundation
One Hope International Foundation
Simcoe Hall Settlement House
St. Andrew's Community Foodbank and Outreach
St. Vincent de Paul Society - St. Gertrude's
St. Vincent de Paul Bowmanville Food Bank
St. Paul's on the Hill Community Food Bank
St. Peter's Food Bank
The Denise House
The Refuge Youth Outreach
The Salvation Army - Bowmanville
The Salvation Army - Oshawa
The Salvation Army - Whitby
Willow Park Co-operative Homes
Y's Wish Shelter
YWCA Durham
Zion Church



Focus on Food in Durham Region

In November 2023, Durham Community Foundation released its first Vital Signs® report. This work provides a comprehensive analysis of Durham Region, highlighting its resilience amid challenges such as rapid growth, housing crisis, and food insecurity, while uncovering opportunities for development and collaboration. It serves as both a reflection of the region's dynamics and a call to action, urging all stakeholders to engage in shaping a stronger, more inclusive community.

In 2024, Durham Community Foundation partnered with Feed the Need in Durham (FTND) to take a closer look at the most pressing issue Vital Signs® identified: food security in Durham.

Food Insecurity in Durham

Durham, like communities across Ontario, is in the midst of an escalating crisis of food insecurity as more residents than at any previous time struggle with the challenge of accessing the food that they require for a healthy and nutritious diet. This has resulted in unprecedented demand and pressure on local community food programs, including food banks and meal programs, who are struggling to meet the growing need. This is a crisis rooted in increasingly expensive cost of living, including rapidly rising costs for necessities like food and housing, and will require collective and systematic solutions to truly address.

This Vital Signs® update reviews the following:

1. The rise of food insecurity in Durham Region and the corresponding increase in demand for local community food programs.
2. The linked increase in cost of living in Durham Region and the impact that this has had on the cost of food for residents.
3. The need for strategic, collective, and systemic responses to this crisis of food insecurity.

We are facing unprecedented demands and pressures on local community food programs.





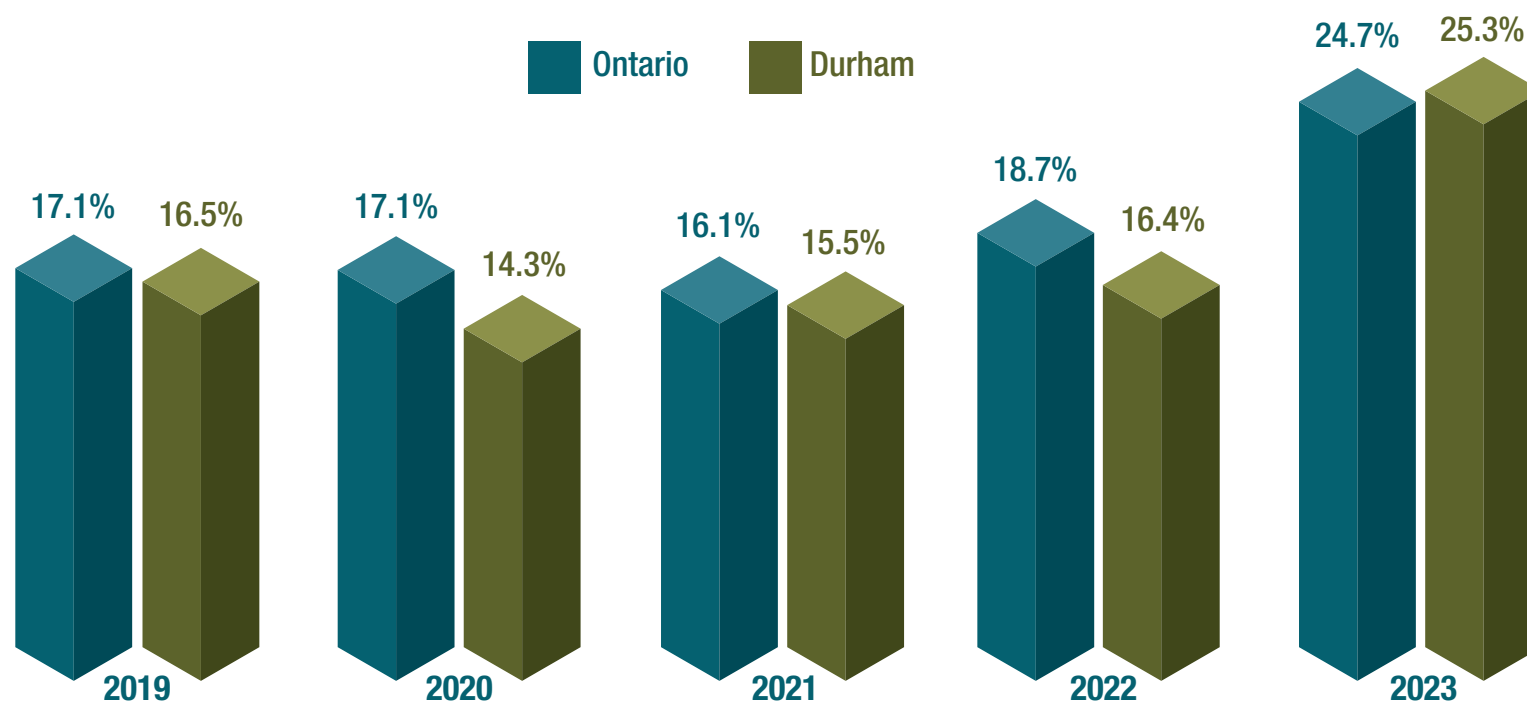
Food Insecurity in Durham

In 2019, with the pandemic silently looming, 16.5% of Durham households were food insecure.¹ This number decreased in 2020 and 2021, as temporary pandemic support benefits increased household incomes and reduced poverty overall across Canada over this period.² In 2022, food insecurity started to increase again, and by 2023 an estimated 25.3%, or 63,872 Durham households are food insecure.³



Food Insecurity in Durham

Within these households, 192,896 individuals (25.6% of the population) are living with food insecurity in Durham Region, an increase of 10.9% over 2022.⁴

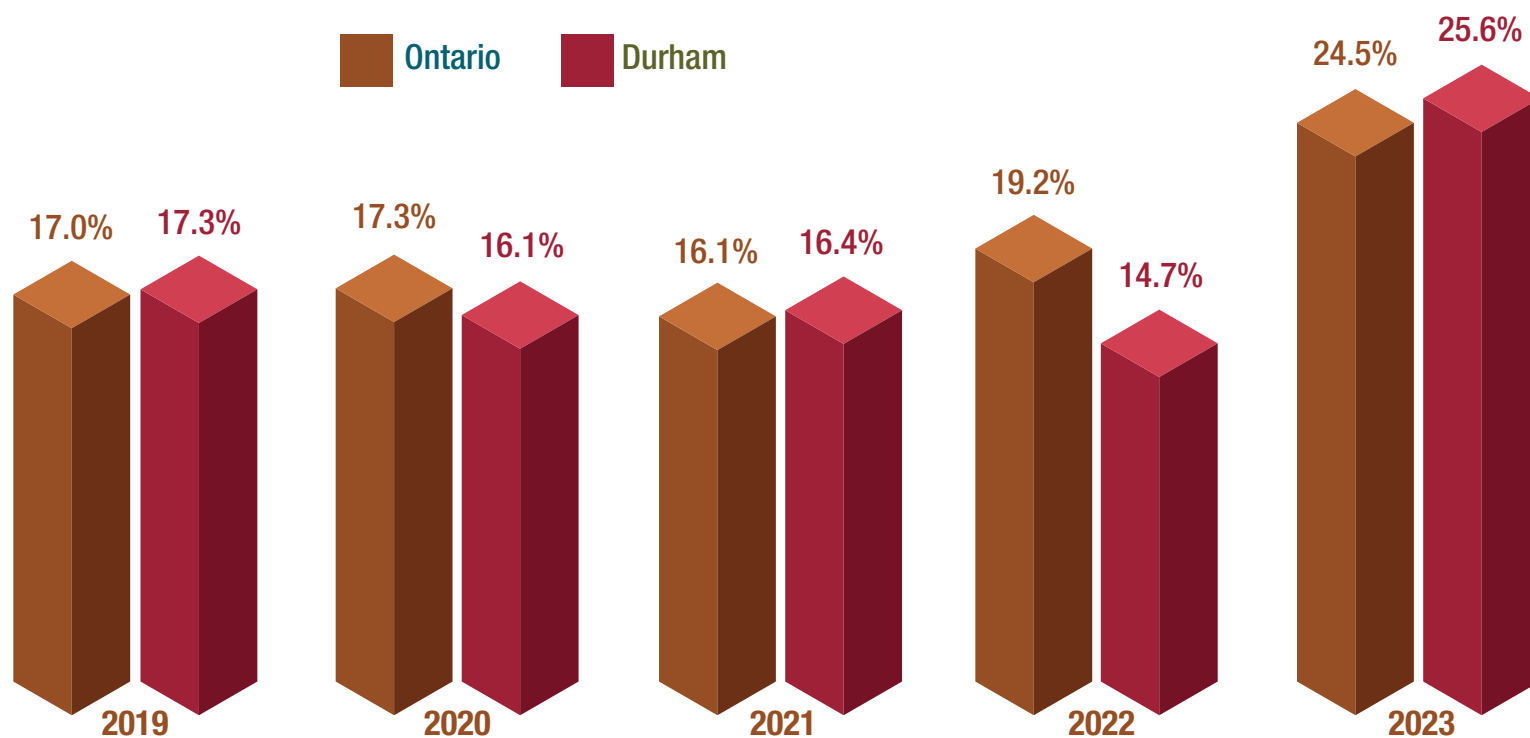


Food Insecure Households, Ontario and Durham (2019 - 2023)

Source: Public Health Ontario, 2024, Snapshots Data file For Household Food Insecurity.



Food Insecurity in Durham



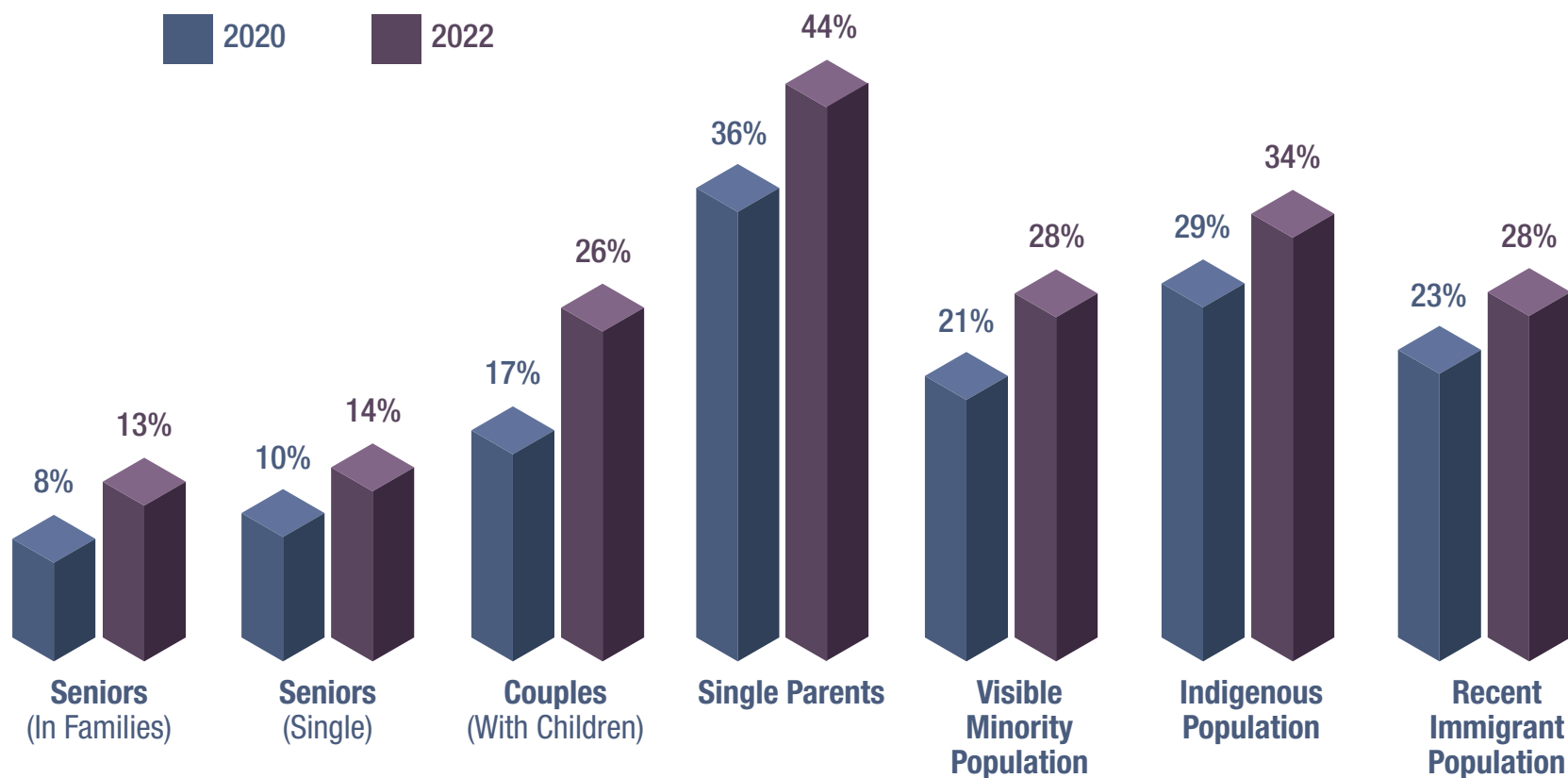
Food Insecure Individuals, Ontario and Durham (2019 - 2023)

Source: Public Health Ontario, 2024, Snapshots Data file For Household Food Insecurity.



Food Insecurity in Durham

Demographic Characteristics of Households who are Food Insecure, Ontario (2020 and 2022)





Rising Costs of Basic Needs

Rising food insecurity in Durham is the direct result of a sharp rise in the cost of basic necessities, in particular a significant rise in the cost of food and housing. From January 2020 to January 2024, the consumer prices for all goods increased by 15.7%, but food prices increased by 22.5% and housing prices by 21.9%.⁵ This rapid rise in the cost of food and housing greatly outpaced historic trends. For example, in the previous 5 year period (2015 - 2019), prices for all goods increased by 7.5%, food prices increased by only 6.9%, and housing prices increased by 7.4%.⁶

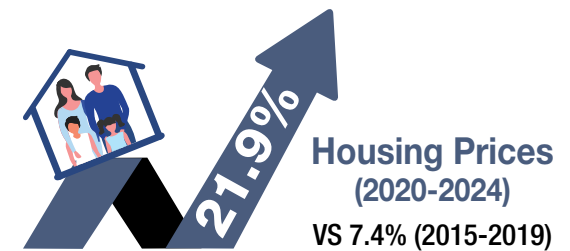
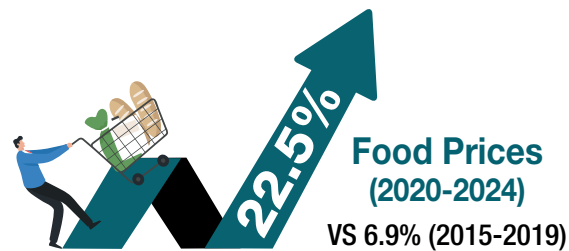
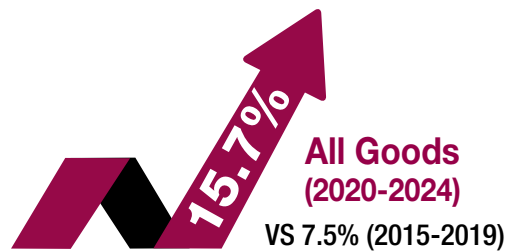
These increases have had a profound impact on household affordability. In Durham, from 2019 to 2023, the monthly cost of food for a family of four increased by 36%, from \$821 per month⁷ to \$1,173 per month.⁸ In the previous 5 year period (2015 - 2018), these same costs in Durham increased by only 2%, from \$830 per month to \$853 per month.⁹



Rising Costs of Basic Needs

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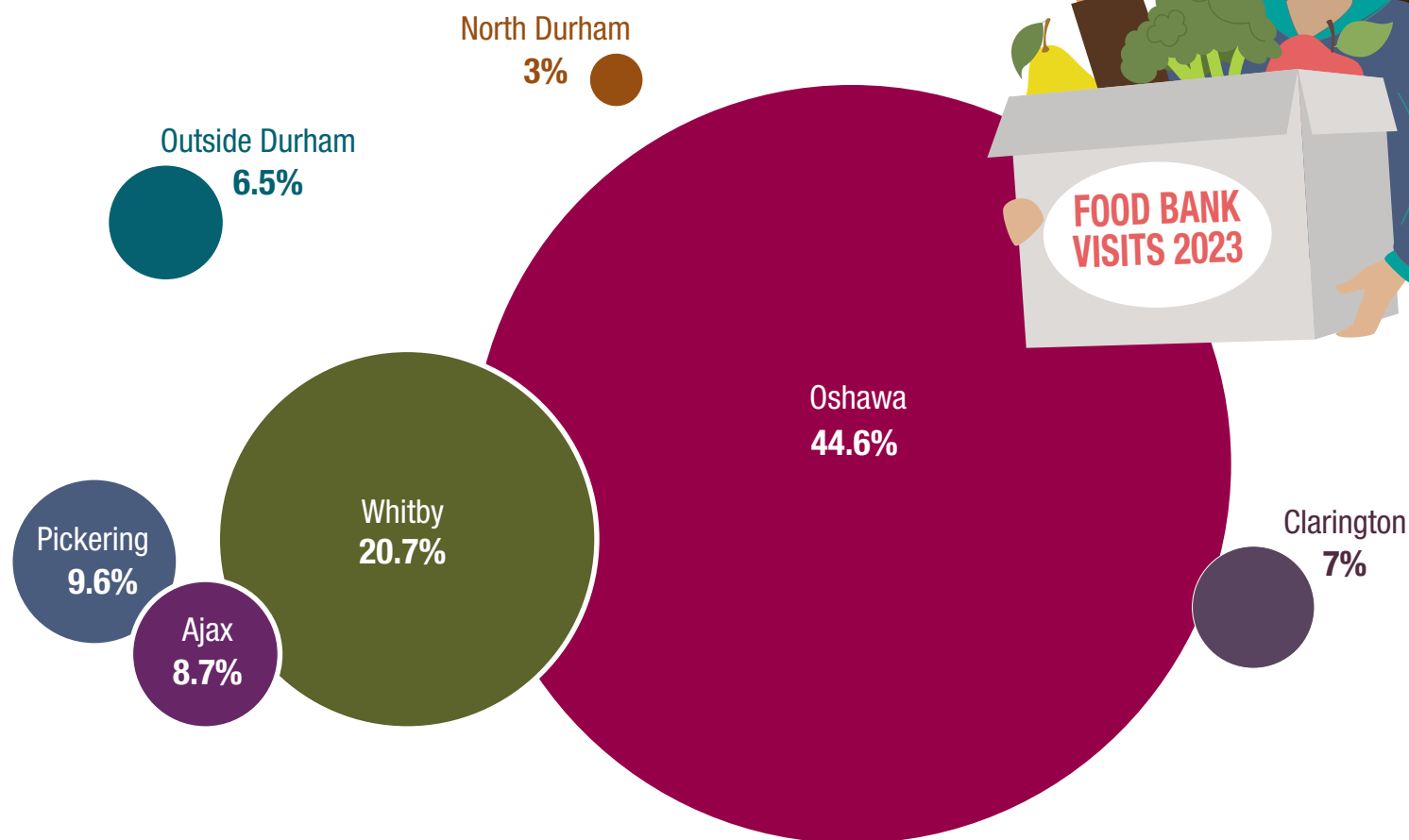


Impacts on Community Food Programs¹⁰

Feed the Need in Durham supports a network of 70 community food programs across Durham Region.¹¹ This includes food banks, pantries, shelters, and meal programs. Since 2021, all have reported a significant increase in both the number of individuals seeking support, and in the number of visits individuals are making to these programs each year.

Impacts on Community Food Programs

In 2023, 37,887 individuals visited a food bank in Durham, an unprecedented increase of 60% since 2021. Of these visits, the majority were made by residents of Oshawa (44.6%), followed by Whitby (20.7%), and Pickering (9.6%).



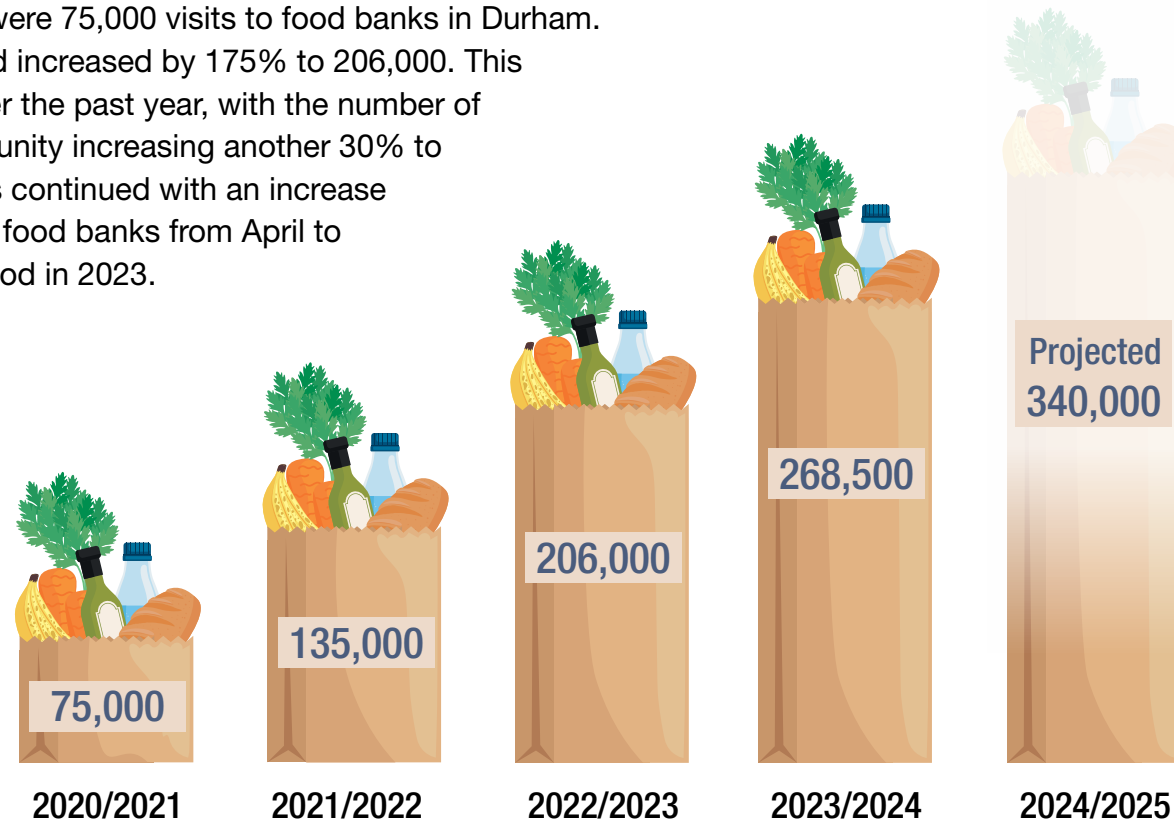


Impacts on Community Food Programs

Food Bank Visits in Durham Surge by Over 250% Since 2020 Amid Rising Costs and Ongoing Need.

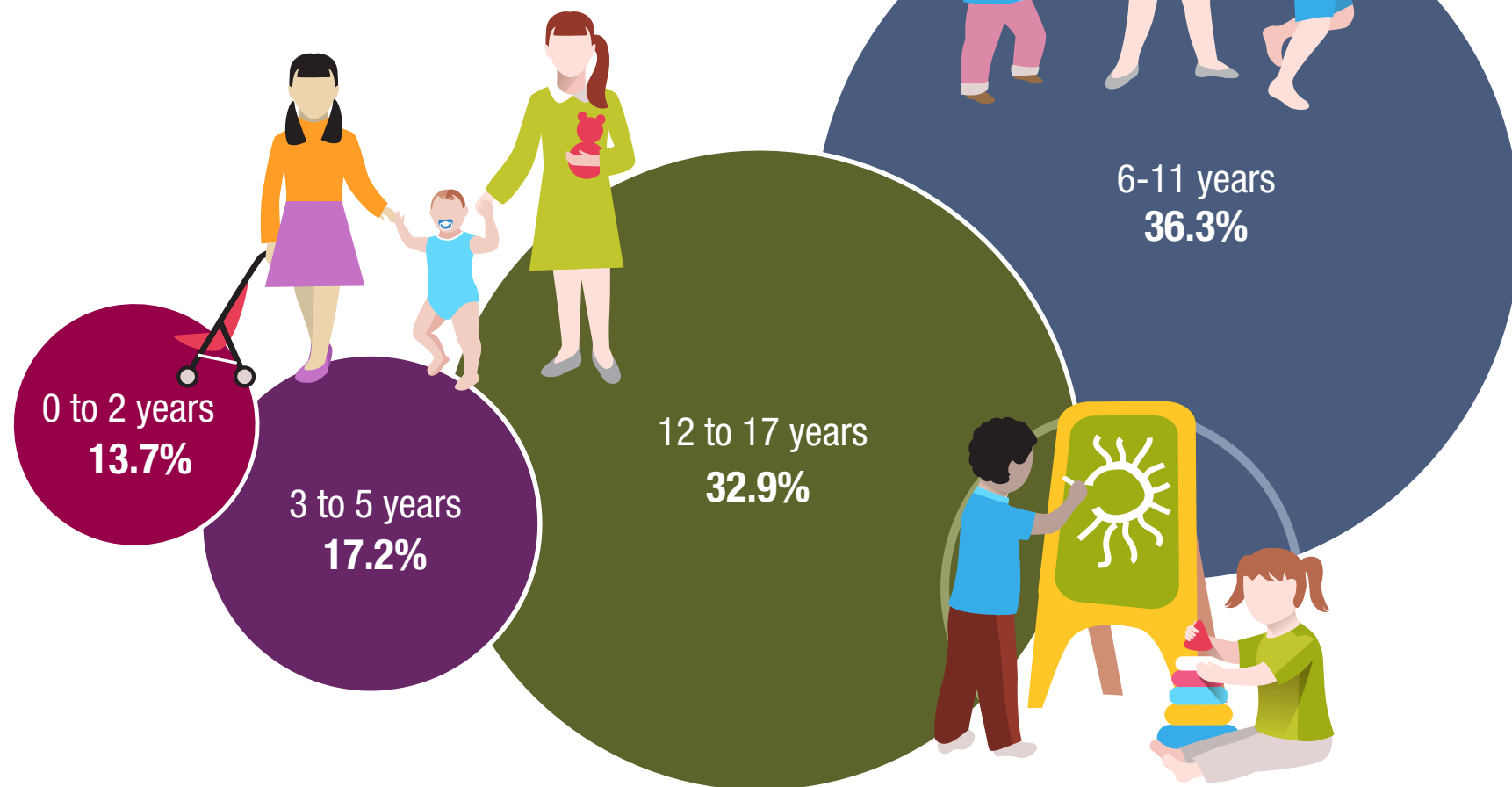
In 2020, at the outset of the pandemic and the coinciding rapid increase in the cost of food and housing, there were 75,000 visits to food banks in Durham. By 2022, the number of visits had increased by 175% to 206,000. This growth has not slowed down over the past year, with the number of visits to food banks in our community increasing another 30% to 268,500 in 2023. This growth has continued with an increase of 27% in the number of visits to food banks from April to October 2024 over the same period in 2023.

Visits to Food Banks
in FTND's Network
(annual)



Impacts on Community Food Programs

Of those individuals accessing food banks in Durham, 35% are children in food insecure households, with 36% of these children being between the ages of 6 and 11 years old.

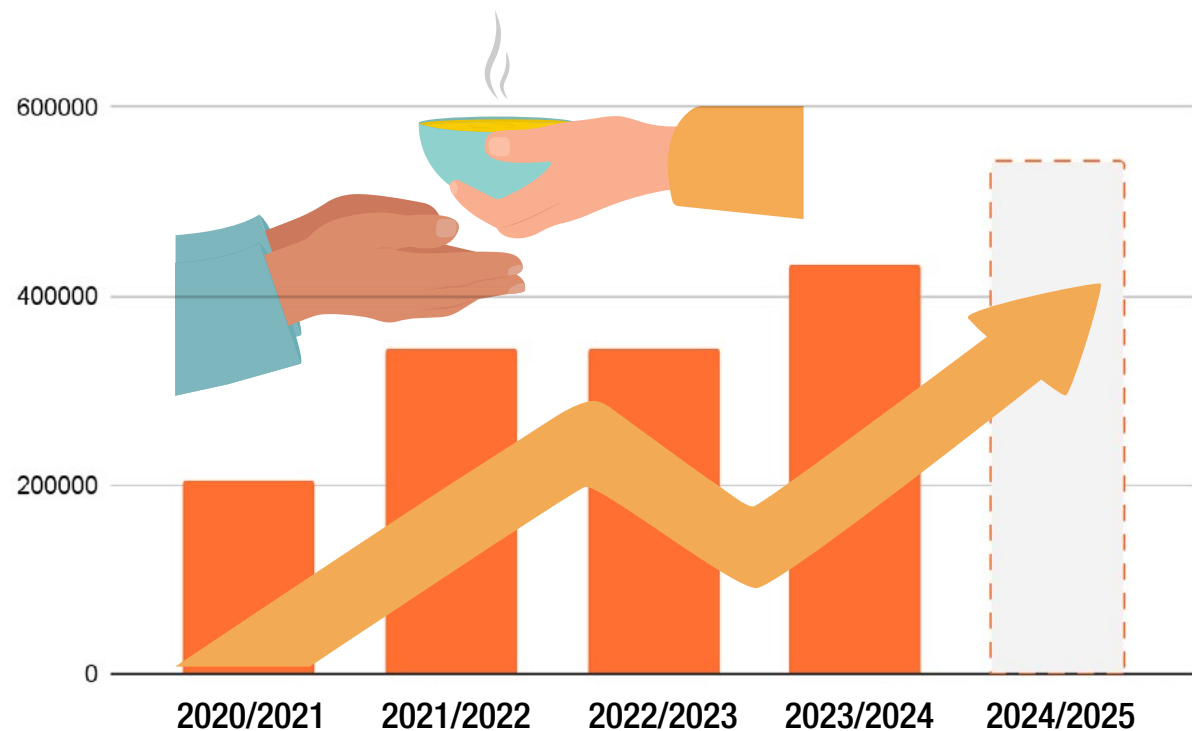




Impacts on Community Food Programs

Feed the Need in Durham Sees 25% Growth in Meal Program Visits, Highlighting Rising Demand for Support.

In addition to visits to food banks, from April 2023 to March 2024 there were 432,000 visits to meal programs in FTND's network, an increase of 26% over the previous year. This growth has continued with an increase of 25% in the number of visits to meal programs from April to October 2024 over the same period in 2023.



Visits to Meal Programs in FTND's Network (annual)

Supply Versus Demand

Overall, visits to all programs in FTND's network have increased by approximately 30% from 2023 to 2024, reaching 700,000. This represents a 154% increase since 2020, or an additional 500,000 visits to community food programs in Durham.

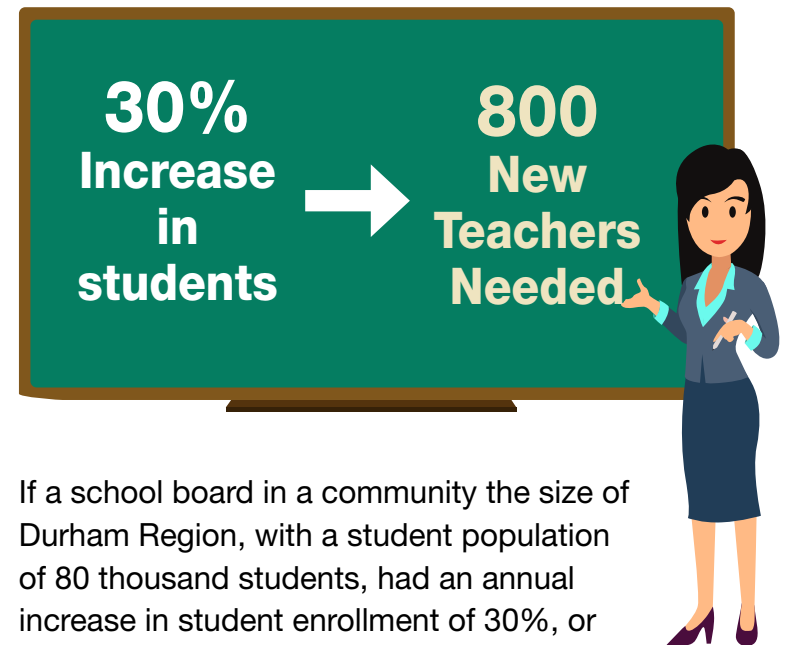




Supply Versus Demand

To put this growth dynamic in perspective, if we take just the growth from the past year, we can look at how a similar growth pattern may impact other community sectors; education and policing.

If a police service in that same community had to respond to an annual population increase of 30%, based on the policing formula of 171 officers per 100,000 residents, that service would need 307 new officers that year.



If a school board in a community the size of Durham Region, with a student population of 80 thousand students, had an annual increase in student enrollment of 30%, or 24,000 students, that school board would need an additional 800 teachers.



Supply Versus Demand

Feed the Need in Durham increased food distribution by 79% since 2020, with projections to reach 2.5 million pounds by 2025, but demand continues to outpace supply, reducing the amount of food provided per client visit.

These growth trends are untenable, and despite the best efforts of the community food programs in Durham, cannot be fully met under current circumstances .

As the number of visits to community food programs in Durham has increased, food supply provided by FTND to these organizations has also increased significantly - 79% since 2020, from 1.23 million pounds of food per year to 2.2 million pounds of food per year, and is projected to increase another 14% by 2025, to 2.5 million pounds annually. This is a significant increase in output over a relatively short period (for context, in the previous 5 year period, 2014 to 2018, FTND increased its annual food distribution by a total of 30%, or 280,000 pounds); however, the demand has significantly outpaced the supply, resulting in a reduction in the amount of food provided per visit to clients over this time.





Organization Planning and Readiness for Change

In the fall of 2024, FTND conducted a network capacity survey of its member agencies to assess their overall capacity and readiness to respond to the growing demand for community food programming.

Overall, FTND's network of community food programs is divided in its planning and readiness to respond to changes that may impact the delivery of their food programs. While it appears that organizations are generally prepared to respond to changes in context, resources, and demand, many do not have plans in place to support the strategic growth and development of their food programs.



Organization Planning and Readiness for Change

Of the organizations in FTND's network,

68% have formal plans in place to respond to any significant loss or change in resources that are available to their food program, including a loss or change to food supply or funding.

In addition,

63% of these organizations indicated that they have a specific plan in place to address a significant loss or change to the human resources (staff and/or volunteers) available for their food program.

Those organizations that do not have these plans in place tend to be the smaller, volunteer based programs with little or no direct staff support from the administering organization.

However, while the network may be well equipped to respond to immediate changes that may impact their food programming,

53% of these organizations noted that they do not have a strategic plan in place to support the planned growth and development of their food programming.





Changes to Programs and Services

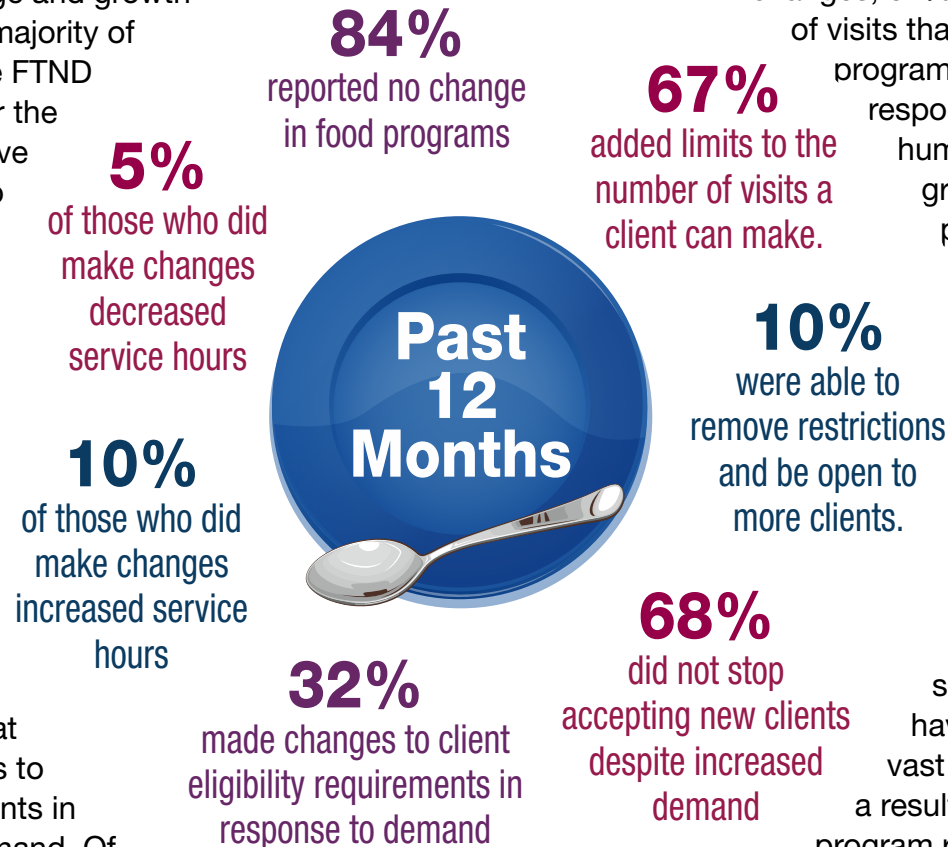
Feed the Need in Durham's network has faced growing challenges as demand for food programs continues to rise. While most organizations have managed to maintain their services, some have had to adjust operations by reducing service hours, changing client eligibility, or limiting the amount of food they can provide. Despite these struggles, many programs remain committed to supporting their communities, working to balance increasing needs with limited resources.



Changes to Programs and Services

After a period of change and growth that started in 2020, the majority of organizations (84%) in the FTND network indicated that over the past 12 months, there have been no significant changes to their food programs. Of those that have made changes, 5% have had to decrease service hours in response to a lack of food available, and 10% have increased service hours as a result of both increased demand and overall changes to their programs goals and parameters.

Further, 32% of network organizations indicated that they had to make changes to client eligibility requirements in response to changes in demand. Of those organizations that made these



changes, 67% have added limits to the number of visits that clients can make to their programs. This was primarily done in response to a lack of both food and human resources required to meet growing demand overall for the programs. In contrast, 10% of all organizations in the FTND network were able to remove restrictions, allowing them to be open to more clients as demand has increased.

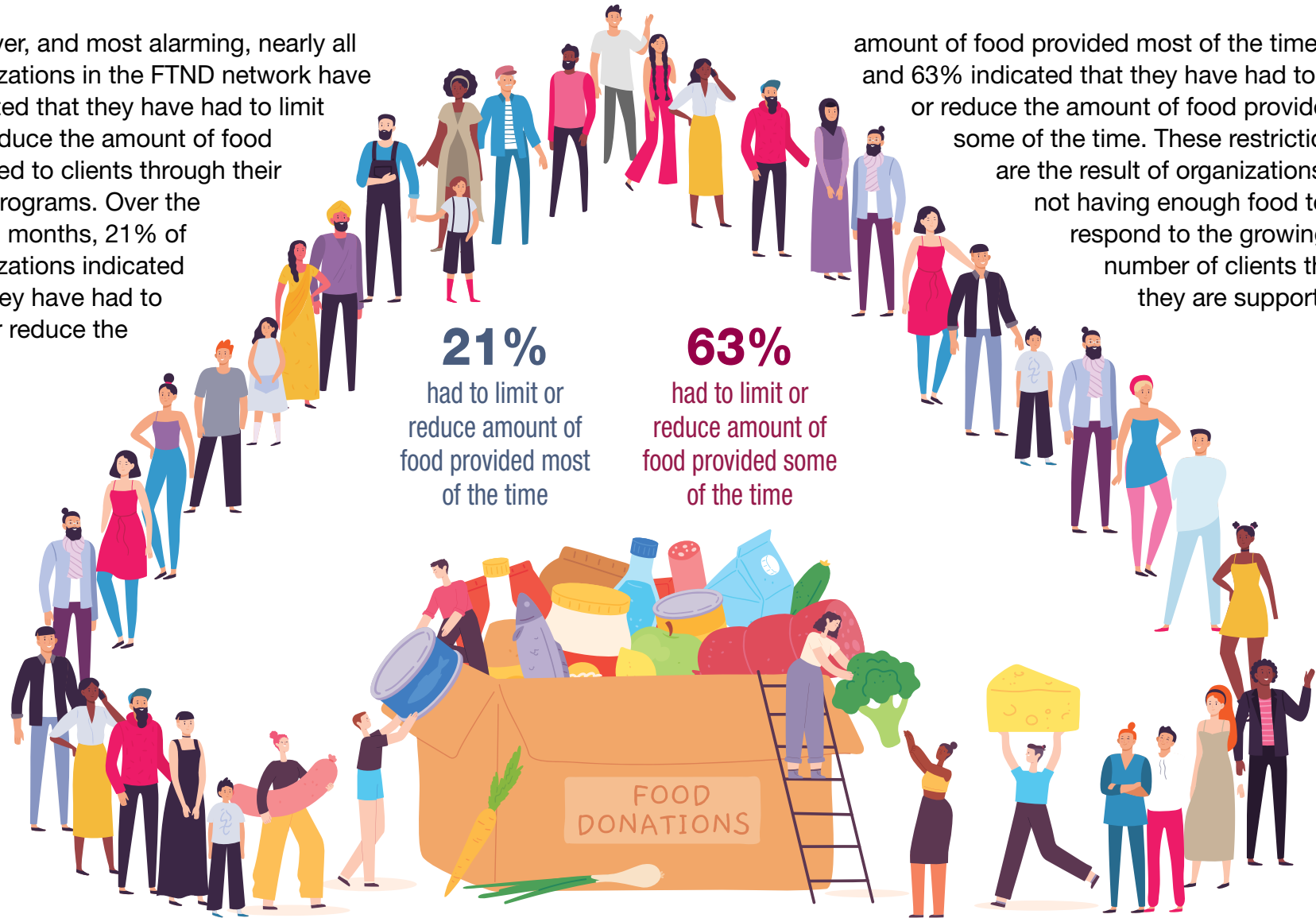
Despite increased demand for programming, 68% of network organizations have not had to stop accepting new clients or turn anyone away who has sought support. Of those that have had to turn clients away, the vast majority have had to do so as a result of overall agency or general program restrictions not associated with their food programming (e.g. limited shelter beds, restriction on agency operating hours).



Changes to Programs and Services

However, and most alarming, nearly all organizations in the FTND network have indicated that they have had to limit and reduce the amount of food provided to clients through their food programs. Over the last 12 months, 21% of organizations indicated that they have had to limit or reduce the

amount of food provided most of the time, and 63% indicated that they have had to limit or reduce the amount of food provided some of the time. These restrictions are the result of organizations not having enough food to respond to the growing number of clients that they are supporting.



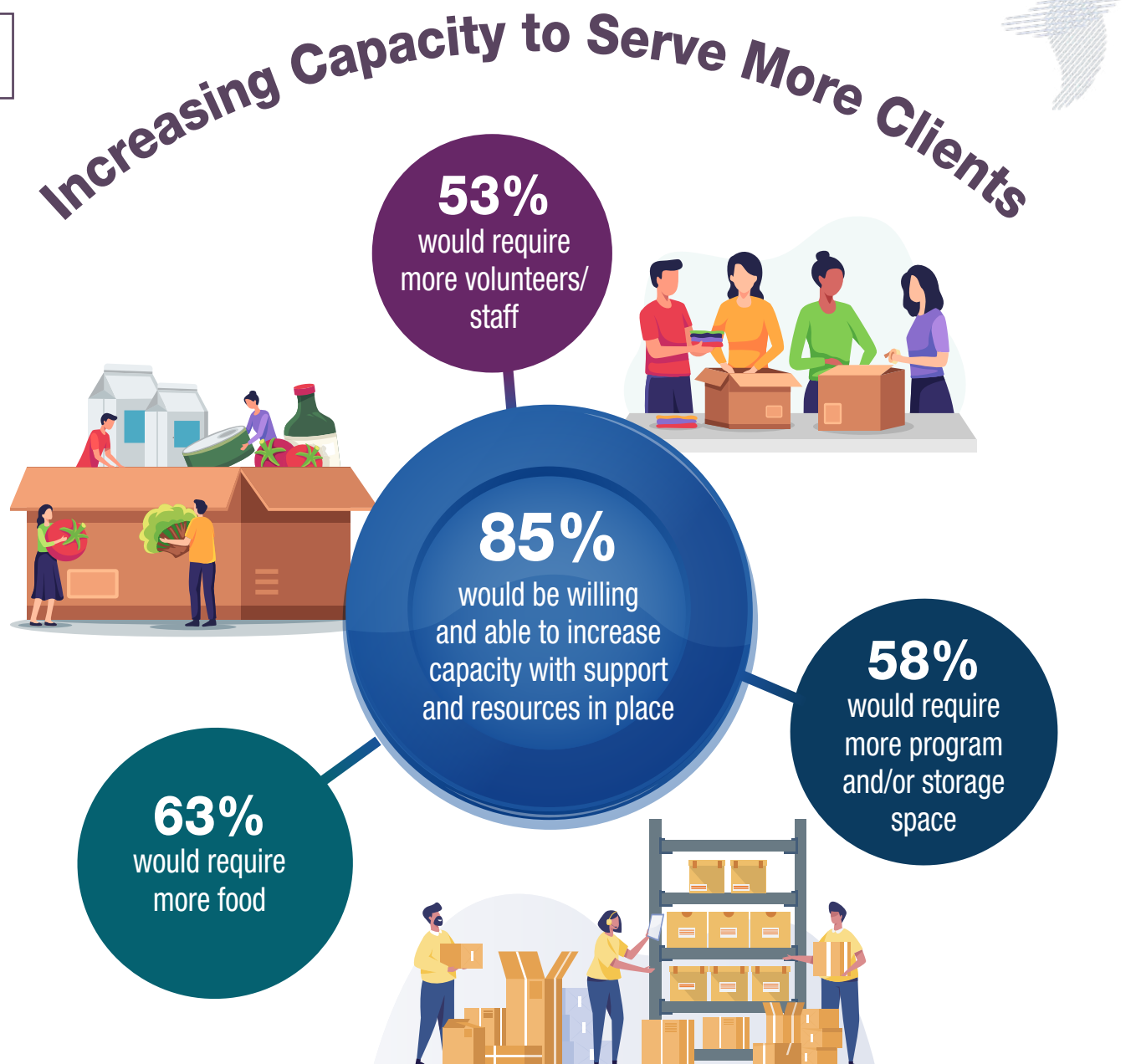
Capacity for Growth

Many organizations within the Feed the Need in Durham network are eager to expand their capacity to serve more clients but face challenges due to limited resources. To achieve this growth, they require increased food supplies, additional storage or program space, and more volunteers or staff. While Feed the Need provides a significant portion of the food used by some programs, many organizations also rely on community donations, grocery store contributions, and food purchases to meet the needs of their communities.



Capacity for Growth

Overall, 85% of the organizations in the FTND network indicated that, if they had the resources and support in place, they would be willing and able to increase their capacity to serve more clients. To achieve this, 63% of organizations would require more food, 58% would require additional program and/or storage space, and 53% would require additional volunteers and/or staff to support the food program.



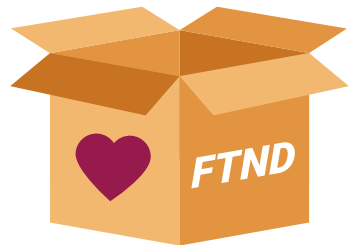


Capacity for Growth

For 16% of the organizations in the FTND network, FTND provides 90% or more of the food for their community food program, however, on average, organizations in the FTND network receive 45% of their food from FTND. After FTND, the primary sources of food for organizations in the network

are retail grocery store donations and in-store collection, community food donations and food drives, and food purchasing. In the last 12 months, 84% of organizations in the network purchased at least some food for their community food program, with an average spend of \$22,194 annually.

Current Sources of Food



45%
received from
FTND



Community
donations and
food drives



Grocery Store
donations and
in-store collection



\$22,194
average annual spend on
food last 12 months



Implications and Next Steps

Feed the Need in Durham's network has faced growing challenges as demand for food programs continues to rise. While most organizations have managed to maintain their services, some have had to adjust operations by reducing service hours, changing client eligibility, or limiting the amount of food they can provide. Despite these struggles, many programs remain committed to supporting their communities, working to balance increasing needs with limited resources.



Implications and Next Steps

There is a need to support the continued capacity development of Durham's community food programs through strategic investments that focus on building sustainable responses to the crisis of food insecurity. This must necessarily involve the existing network of organizations across Durham who have the expertise and experience required to create lasting, community led, solutions to these challenges. This work must be based in principles of collective impact, and must be planned and coordinated rather than reactive.

While continuing the important work to respond to hunger in our community by providing support through community food programs, Feed the Need in Durham supports policy change that will reduce poverty and increase dignified access to food for residents of Durham and all Canadians. We support Food Banks Canada's call for the introduction of a Groceries and Essentials Benefit to provide increased income support for Canada's lowest income households. This must be viewed as a key first step toward the introduction of a national basic income guarantee that would be available to all Canadians when they needed it most, providing an income floor to reduce and stave off poverty across our community.



Strategic Investments

Building sustainable responses to food insecurity

Involving the expertise of the existing network

Planned and Co-ordinated

Policy Change

Reduce poverty and increase dignified access to food

Groceries and Essentials Benefit

Introduction of a National Basic Income Guarantee



Implications and Next Steps

Increasing income supports to reduce poverty are vital first steps to reducing poverty and increasing access to food for residents in Durham. But the work cannot stop there. The true root of food insecurity lies in a food system that is focused on productivity over security and sustainability, and that is increasingly impacted by the challenges of climate change. To truly create community food security, we need to look closely, honestly, and collectively at our food systems to identify and make the changes required for a food system that will meet the demands and challenges of the twenty-first century.

This work starts at home, in Durham, where we can work together with producers, processors, retailers, government, community organizations, and residents to identify community-based actions that can support food security and a sustainable local food system. Feed the Need in Durham is committed to this work as we believe that it provides the best path forward to truly engaging and addressing the crisis of food insecurity that we currently face.



Sustainable Food System

Focus on sustainability
vs productivity

Adapt to the impacts
of climate change

Promote sustainable
food practices

Increase Awareness

Work together as
a community

Identify community
based actions

Vital Steps We Can All Take

Supporting food security requires collective action.

Funders can support community food organizations and innovative projects that promote sustainable local food systems while Individuals can contribute by donating or volunteering with food programs to help meet the needs of their communities.

Together, we can build a stronger, more equitable food system.





Implications and Next Steps

For Funders:

- Engage and support established community food organizations and programs that have a strategic plan in place to build capacity and sustainable responses to the challenges faced by the communities that they serve and support.
- Support innovative projects that will help to build a sustainable local food system that ensures that all residents have access to the food that they need for a healthy and nutritious diet.



For Individuals:

- To the best of your ability, get involved with Feed the Need in Durham and other local food banks by raising and donating food and funds to support the vital work that they do.
- Volunteer with well established community food programs, helping them to grow their capacity and response to the needs of our community.



“Every one of us is a product of our community. The communities we grow up in – and move into – make us who we are. Every community is the sum of the people who live within it – a unique mix of our personalities, cultures, and interests. The causes we care about, the time we invest, the people we bring together – they all shape our communities now and for future generations. Giving back is how the cycle of a vibrant and sustainable community continues.”

Community Foundations of Canada.

We are here for you and our community.

Please contact our Executive Director, Vivian Curl, to find out how you can join our giving movement.

Vivian Curl

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Charity Registration #: 898797931 RR0001

Join Our Giving Movement!



Endnotes

- ¹ Public Health Ontario, 2024, Snapshots Data File For Household Food Insecurity (2019 - 2023), online at: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity> (Accessed: November 18, 2024).
- ² See Statistics Canada, 2022, Disaggregated trends in poverty from the 2021 Census of Population, online at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021009/98-200-x2021009-eng.cfm> (Accessed: November 18, 2024). Since 2021, poverty rates across Canada have increased to pre-pandemic levels, as the impacts of COVID-19 benefits have waned (Statistics Canada, 2024, The Daily: Canadian Income Survey, 2022, online at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/240426/dq240426a-eng.pdf?st=NvS0mlyl> (Accessed: November 18, 2024).
- ³ Public Health Ontario, 2024, Snapshots Data File For Household Food Insecurity (2019 - 2023), online at: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity> (Accessed: November 18, 2024).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Statistics Canada, [Table 18-10-0004-01 Consumer Price Index, monthly, not seasonally adjusted](#)
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Durham Region Health Department, 2019, The Price of Eating Well in Durham 2019.
- ⁸ Durham Region Health Department, 2023, The Price of Eating Well in Durham 2023.
- ⁹ Durham Region Health Department, 2018, The Price of Eating Well in Durham 2018.
- ¹⁰ All data presented in this section comes from FTND's Link2Feed Database that collects client service data from all 70 community food programs in the organization's network.
- ¹¹ For a full list of these programs see: <https://feedtheneedindurham.ca/find-food>.
- ¹² See: <https://foodbankscanada.ca/advocacy-government-relations/geb/>.