



## Bringing Health and Nutrition into Focus

The weather outside is cold but the interior of the room is bright and warm. Around noon, people start trickling in. They hang up their coats, get some hot coffee, and make themselves comfortable, all set to see what the latest 'Serving Up Health and Wellbeing' workshop has in store for them.

Supported by the Government of Ontario's Healthy Communities Fund, North York Harvest's health and wellbeing workshops focus on equipping food bank clients with healthy eating skills and promoting mental and physical health.

Aligned with North York Harvest's goal of building healthy communities, this new workshop series promotes the development of our 'Community Food Bank' model and integrates more comprehensive programming alongside our frontline food assistance services.

Partnering with Fairview Community Health Centre and Unison Health and Community Services, North York Harvest runs these free sessions for low-income individuals and families across our three Community Food Bank locations – Lawrence Heights, Bathurst-Finch, and Don Mills & Sheppard.

"By participating in such workshops, we can improve our knowledge in a multicultural environment and learn from each other", says one of the regular participants at our latest Don Mills-Sheppard location.

Over the last three months, North York Harvest clients have come together to cook nutritious meals in community kitchens, to de-stress and improve their health through yoga, and to learn how to grow nutritious sprouts in their own homes. They've also had the chance to go pick their own corn and peppers on

*"Such opportunities definitely foster community spirit"*

– Ruby, workshop participant

farm field trips. The workshops also cover topics such as cholesterol and diabetes, for many of the clients served are at-risk for these diet-related health issues. But whatever the topic, sharing personal recipes seems to be the most popular activity in almost every workshop.

According to the annual survey from our Lawrence Heights Community Food Bank, 80% of the households receiving food assistance are not accessing



other community services. This limits the support that clients receive to help maintain a healthy lifestyle. The workshop series aims to provide several opportunities for clients to better utilize these community resources.

"The workshops are beneficial to clients in making sound food choices, improving their lifestyle in the community and using the items from the food bank in a healthier manner for their families." shares Ella Victor, Manager of Client Services at the Lawrence Heights Community Food Bank.

More than just a means of engaging community members in discussions regarding health and wellbeing, the few hours that participants spend with each other are used effectively for everyone to learn, share and connect.

"I had a wonderful time learning new facts from other participants about food items that I always used to see in my grocery store but never knew what to do with", says one excited participant, Ruby, after a trip to the local supermarket to explore food choices. "Such opportunities definitely foster community spirit", she adds as she signs up for the next workshop.

## Community Food Banks

In addition to the many partner programs we support, North York Harvest runs three Community Food Banks. Through these locations we are working to broaden the focus of traditional food banks and provide a well-rounded experience for clients. Along with food distribution at the centres, we also collaborate with local community organizations to offer a wide range of food and health based programs.

Our vision for Community Food Banks is governed by three main principles:

- **Dignity** through creating welcoming spaces for clients and strengthening relationships with them.
- **Empower** by fostering client participation as volunteers in the food banks and in decision-making roles on our Community Advisory Councils
- **Connect** clients to a wide range of neighbourhood resources, including community kitchens, farm trips, health & wellbeing workshops and education.

## Winter Food Drive Receives Great Support, But Needs More to Meet Demand

North York Harvest aimed high this winter to meet the 19% increase in demand across our network. Although we were not able to meet our goal of 240,000 lbs and \$240,000, we would like to offer a big thank you to all our donors and volunteers for going above and beyond to support us at this crucial time of the year.

When we set our winter targets we knew they were ambitious, but we also knew they were what we would need to meet the growing need in our northern Toronto communities.

With 210,000 lbs of nourishing food raised our shelves are getting stocked for the cold months ahead, but there is still room for more!

Though the food drive is over, you can still drop off nutritious, non-perishable food at your local fire halls and



Mother & daughter help sort winter food drive donations

participating supermarkets, or make a financial donation through our office or website.

Please visit [www.northyorkharvest.com/get-involved](http://www.northyorkharvest.com/get-involved) for more information and thank you for helping us bring food for today and hope for tomorrow to people across northern Toronto.

## Thanks to Our Sounds of the Season Donors

We would like to extend a thank you to the CBC and its listeners for their terrific support through the Sounds of the Season fundraiser for GTA food banks.

Not only did the annual event help to raise much needed funds for our food programs, but it was also a great way to get North York Harvest's message out on the airwaves. On the day of the big event, Diana, one of our clients, bravely told her own story on *Metro Morning*, sharing live with listeners just one of the many reasons people turn to food banks for support.

Additional media coverage included CBC National News with our supermarket workshop and an interview on CBC's *Here and Now* as well as one for their French listeners on Radio Canada. A big thank you to everyone involved for all their hard work.



Diana ready to share her story on CBC's Metro Morning

## Virtual Food Drive: an easy, online way to give

For those who missed our Winter Food Drive, there's still a chance to help out!

Consider joining our Virtual Food Drive to raise awareness about hunger and poverty issues in your community!

Why join? It is an efficient, cost-effective and easy way to direct resources to the 60 programs and services North York Harvest supports.

Donations go directly towards:

- Providing dignified food assistance and support to your community

- Raising public awareness and providing education regarding hunger and its causes
- Engaging the community in meeting its members' food needs.



It only takes a few minutes to register with our online tool. Raise funds as a group or enter a team and compete with your friends, family and colleagues at [www.northyorkharvest.com/vfd](http://www.northyorkharvest.com/vfd).

Donations are made online and donors will receive an electronic tax receipt instantly!

For more information, contact Leslie at North York Harvest Food Bank at [leslie@northyorkharvest.com](mailto:leslie@northyorkharvest.com) or 416-635-7771 x 33.

## We Couldn't Have Done It Without You!

With your support over the last year, North York Harvest was able to:

- Collect and distribute a record 2 million lbs of food across 60 partner programs
- Distribute 170,000 nourishing food hampers
- Grow hundreds of pounds of organic produce in our community gardens
- Work with 1,000 students through youth action workshops

Thank you for a terrific year and we wish you all the best for 2013!



**YES! I want to help people right here in my community!**

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