

Good Shepherd Final Report
By Johanne Jean-Pierre, Sabrina Douglas and Eshan Shaw

An Evaluation of the Hamilton Good Shepherd Emergency Food and Clothing Program

Prepared in consultation with The Good Shepherd

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Funded by *Forward With Integrity*, McMaster University



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this evaluation was to explore the factors that contribute to the increased traffic at the Hamilton Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program. We explored program clients' experience of and reaction to the new food and clothing program by asking questions related to their frequency of use, the qualities of the program, practices that can be improved, and the life changes required to no longer need an emergency food program. On July 15th and July 16th, 2015, a research team conducted sixty 10-minute interviews with participants who volunteered while waiting for the beginning of the distribution.

The findings indicate that two thirds of the participants attend monthly the Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program, while the others go every two months. Participants appreciate several qualities: the large number of items allocated for single individuals or family; the availability of items for children; the variety of food products offered; and the proximity of the emergency food and clothing program to their homes. Participants also appreciate organizational characteristics such as the ability to select items, the warm and welcoming staff, the clarity of instructions, spacious location, the rapidity of distribution and the availability of food and clothing at the same location. The two qualities most important to participants are the ability to select the desired food and clothing items and the warm welcoming staff.

Few participants believed that the service should be changed at the Good Shepherd Venture Centre. A very small number of participants suggested that registration and the waiting period were the main organizational characteristics that should be improved. Several participants wished to receive more fresh fruits and vegetables, more meat, more milk and other dairy products, as well as food that accommodate specific dietary needs.

A majority of participants shared that with access to more financial resources, they would no longer experience food insecurity. Increased financial resources could happen by finding full-time or part-time employment. Some participants explained that disability, lack of English language skills, education or access to daycare are challenges that prevent them from securing employment. Others expressed that they would need increased funding from *Ontario Works* or *Ontario Disability Support Program* and access to affordable housing was also raised as a factor.

The findings of this study, together with the increased demand which prompted the study, suggest that the model of operations evaluated here places the Good Shepherd at the forefront of client-focused emergency food and clothing provision in Hamilton.

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“Because when we use to go over at the old place, they just gave you a bag, and now you can choose your own stuff that you know you will eat. So that’s one of the good aspects, you get to choose what you want, and if you don’t want it, you don’t have to take it.” Participant 14

“I love that it looks like you are shopping at the mall, it’s not you are handed your food. You start to feel like, a little bit more, like you are shopping” Participant 17

“I like how you treat people with humanity, because some of them (other food banks) don’t”
Participant 30

Introduction

The Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program located at 155 Cannon Street East in Hamilton has experienced a rapid surge in demand. The purpose of this study is to understand and document the factors leading to the program’s popularity. To do so, four areas: a) the frequency of use; b) the positive aspects of the emergency food and clothing program; c) aspects that can be improved; and, d) life changes that would be required to no longer need a food bank. This report presents the context of food insecurity in Hamilton, summarizes the main findings of this evaluation and outlines what we consider to be the Good Shepherd’s best practices.

Context

A number of socio-economic factors shape the lives of the participants. Most prominently, these include employment, access to social housing and disability.

In the past decade, Canada has experienced considerable changes in the economy, resulting in the Great Recession from 2007 to 2009, net job losses, and a fluctuating unemployment rate. During this recession, Canada lost 430,000 jobs and the unemployment rate reached 8.7 percent in 2009 (Zmitrowicz & Khan, 2014). Since then, Canada was able to progress by regaining the lost jobs, adding approximately 600,000 more jobs, and lowering the unemployment rate to 7.2 percent in 2013 (Zmitrowicz & Khan, 2014). However, the recession resulted in long-term unemployment, which is defined as "being out of work for at least 27 weeks" (Zmitrowicz & Khan, 2014, p.45). After this period, it can be difficult to secure new employment and an individual is more likely to

suffer from low wages and the stigma associated with being unemployed (Zmitrowicz & Khan, 2014). However, Hamilton was experiencing economic challenges before this recession.

The City of Hamilton, known for its prominent steel and manufacturing industry, has been subject to an extended period of deindustrialization (Bramwell, 2012). This deindustrialization over the past ten years coupled with multiple plant closures has resulted in the loss of well-paid, stable manufacturing jobs (Bramwell, 2012). Furthermore, the city suffers from a drastically high poverty rate with around 20 percent of the Hamilton population residing under the Low-Income Cut Off line (Bramwell, 2012). A qualitative study that examined Hamilton neighbourhood hubs and quality of life revealed that residents believed that the state of the economy and securing employment were central to improving their quality of life in Hamilton (Eby, Kitchen & Williams, 2012). Several immigrants choose to live in Hamilton and experience difficulties in the labour market for other reasons.

Many immigrants have migrated from geographic areas that vastly differed in terms of language, culture, and society. Canadian immigrants since 1970 have attained higher levels of education which used to contribute to their economic success (Reitz, 2007). However, some immigrants are still discriminated against in the labour market for their foreign credentials (Reitz, 2007). Simultaneously, immigrants that are proficient in French or English are more likely to find highly-skilled jobs in the labour market whereas those who are unable to speak one of the official languages usually find themselves working low wage jobs, or being unemployed (Pottie, Ng, Spitzer, Mohammed & Glazier, 2008). Like immigrant status, disability status can also contribute to specific challenges to secure employment.

Research conducted by Stapleton and Procyk (2011) analyzed the *Ontario Disability Support Program* (ODSP) and revealed that 89 percent of ODSP recipients are unemployed, making them 11 times more likely to suffer from unemployment than the average Ontarian (Stapleton & Procyk, 2011). Several unemployed ODSP recipients desire to enter the workforce to increase their well-being and self-worth (Stapleton & Procyk, 2011). In fact, employed ODSP recipients earn approximately 650 dollars per month or choose more covert employment options that allow them to earn an income while still receiving their ODSP benefits (Stapleton & Procyk, 2011).

Affordable housing often represents an important stabilizing factor for low-income individuals and families. Canadian housing officials, advocates, and banks, consider that housing is affordable if it costs no more than 30% before tax of a household income (Wetselaar, 2010). In that context, if more than 30% of one's income is spent on housing, there are increased odds of food insecurity (Kirkpatrick, 2011). However, as seen when comparing 473 families in market rental versus subsidized housing in high-poverty urban neighbourhoods, simply living in subsidized housing does not demonstrate a marked difference in the degree of food insecurity (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Yet, families in subsidized housing experienced less food insecurity than those on a waiting list for such housing (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Moreover, it was found that unattached individuals

(singles living alone) often face the biggest challenge in finding affordable rental housing in Hamilton (Wetselaar, 2010.) This is reflected in the rising population of unattached individuals relying on the emergency food bank programs. To keep pace with affordable housing demand, 629 units need to be built each year in Hamilton, but in 2008, only 162 units were completed through the *Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program* (Wetselaar, 2010).

Methodology

The research protocol consisted of in-person interviews with the food bank's clients based on a short questionnaire (see Appendix A). Interviews were preferred to focus groups to ensure each participant's privacy. Due to the range of English-language competence, it was better to conduct interviews rather than to distribute printed questionnaires. Participants were informed a month in advance that this study would take place, and flyers were distributed to facilitate recruitment. Participants provided oral consent to participate and to have interviews recorded with the guarantee that their answers would remain confidential. These interviews took place at the Good Shepherd's Venture Centre on July 15 and July 16, 2015, while the clients were waiting for the beginning of the distribution. A total of 60 participants voluntarily participated in this study and the Good Shepherd provided \$10 Dollarama gift cards as compensation. We were able to recruit a diverse group of participants including men, women, those with visible and invisible disabilities, Canadian-born individuals as well as newcomers from different backgrounds. These short interviews were conducted by a research coordinator and two trained research assistants, and each interview was completed within ten minutes.

During data collection, certain adjustments were made to ensure that we recruited participants with different demographic characteristics to obtain a range of cases for analysis. For instance, since men were eager and prompt to volunteer their participation on the first day, the research team made efforts to encourage women to participate in the interviews that followed. In order for the interviews to be conducted in an orderly fashion, volunteers were assigned numbers while they were waiting. Moreover, the research team transitioned the interviews from the second floor to the main floor on the first day after six completed interviews, which improved accessibility for some participants. A few participants experienced difficulty participating since English was not their first language. When possible, we found someone to translate, or used other languages that we knew. If neither of these options was available, we explained the questions as well as we could. Following data collection, the team together conducted the analysis of the responses from each participant.

Findings

Duration and Frequency

The length of time that participants had used the emergency food and clothing program ranged from two months to 39 years. On average, participants had been attending the Good Shepherd for 3.5 years. More than two thirds of the participants attend monthly while others attend every two months or only when needed. Some participants explained that they attend every other month because they have to pay for their Hydro bills.

Positive aspects of the service

Two main categories of responses described the program's positive qualities: a) fulfillment of needs and b) positive organizational characteristics. Above all, the ability to select the desired items and the welcoming employees make the Good Shepherd outstanding in comparison to other city food banks.

Participants' needs were met by the Good Shepherd in ways that distinguish this program from that of other local food banks. A total of 11 participants highly appreciate the higher number of items allocated to individuals and families in comparison to other food banks. They also appreciate items for children such as formula, diapers, children's clothing and toys and the variety of items that can be selected—from bread, to frozen and refrigerated food items. Fresh fruits and vegetables were particularly valued. Finally, four participants live at walking distance and they appreciate the proximity because they do not have to spend money on transportation.

Participants also noted positive organizational characteristics. Participants identified as important the ability to choose the preferred items, the employees' attitudes, the availability of food and clothing at the same location, the clarity of instructions, the physical environment and the rapidity of distribution.

The most important characteristics that differentiate the Good Shepherd from other Hamilton food banks are: the ability to select preferred items and the positive and respectful attitude of the Good Shepherd's employees. Indeed, 28 participants noted that they feel like they are in a grocery store or shopping mall, and this makes their experience at the Good Shepherd pleasant. Participants who have food sensitivities and health concerns expressed appreciation for being able to choose what they can eat, while others reported that selection enables them to avoid wasting food included in a prepackaged basket that they would not consume. The Good Shepherds' employees were described as friendly, respectful, cheery, warm, welcoming and compassionate in comparison to the staff at other food banks by 22 participants. Other valued organizational characteristics include: the clarity of instructions at every step of the process, including the colour-labeled aisles; the non-marking of food items; cooking instructions for food; clear quantity limit; fair distribution; cleanliness; and, convenient opening hours. The spacious and accessible location with available parking is also

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appreciated. The rapidity with which food and clothing items are distributed satisfies participants. Finally, participants considered that it was very practical that food and clothing items were available at the same location.

Aspects that can be improved

A total of 27 participants thought that they would like to see changes, there were two areas of concerns: a) organizational characteristics and b) the need to allocate more food and clothing items. Two participants suggested that registration and the waiting period were the main organizational characteristics that should be improved. A total of 14 participants wanted to receive more fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, milk, dairy products and products that accommodated their specific dietary needs.

Some participants had organizational criticisms. Two participants suggested that registration should be quicker for people with disabilities and wished that admission was more tightly regulated to ensure that only people in real need of the food program are served. One participant proposed that the Good Shepherd should impose drug tests to prevent drug dealers and drug addicts from being eligible for the program. A total of 2 participants made comments about the waiting room. They suggested that the chairs should be reorganized in the waiting room so that no one sits in the middle of the room, that drinks should be available in the area, that the waiting area should be less crowded, and that there should be no lining up outside in bad weather. One participant mentioned that people with disabilities should not have to wait and should be helped first.

While the majority of participants were grateful that the Good Shepherd offers fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, milk and dairy products since other food banks do not, seven participants would like to see more perishable food items available. These participants reported that they would like more fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, milk and dairy products to be available because these items are expensive at the grocery store. Five others wanted to have access to food that accommodates dietary needs such as lactose-free, sugar-free and preservative-free food for diabetics. Some single clients resent that they are not allocated milk and dairy products as families are. Because of the degree of economic difficulties, one participant expressed the desire to attend this emergency food and clothing program twice a month rather than the permitted monthly service. Some participants expressed their concerns about their desire to obtain more items as families against singles or singles against families. Indeed, 5 single participants thought that the distribution was too family oriented. They believed that the distribution was too centered around the needs of children, not taking into account sufficiently single individuals' needs. Conversely, 4 families thought that the distribution was too centered around the needs of single individuals. These participants wished that there were more snacks for families, that families would be first in the lineup, and that more diapers would be available. This binary opposition and the scrutiny about what others can obtain might

simply reflect feelings related to food insecurity. For instance, a participant even inquired about the possibility that donations decreased over the past few years because she had the impression that there were fewer items.

Life changes required to no longer require an emergency food program

First and foremost, participants reported that they would no longer need to come to the Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program if they had access to more financial resources, whether it is through: a) employment or b) increased *Ontario Works* or *Ontario Disability Support Program* funding.

One third of participants aspired to secure full-time employment, while 9 participants who have disabilities aspired to secure part-time employment. Half of the participants explained that their medical condition or their disability excludes them from most current employment opportunities. Five participants shared that they would need to access ESL education to learn English or professional training to enter the labour market. Four mothers with young children shared that they would need access to daycare to go to work. A total of 26 participants suggested that if their *Ontario Works* or *Ontario Disability Support Program* funding increased or if they received food stamps, they would be able to afford fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, and other dairy products. A total of 15 participants mentioned that access to affordable housing could also change their situation.

Conclusion

Our evaluation of the Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program found that:

1. Two thirds of participants attend monthly the Good Shepherd emergency food and clothing program, while the others attend every two months.
2. Overall, participants expressed overwhelmingly their satisfaction with and preference for the Good Shepherd compared to other food banks in the City of Hamilton.
 - Participants' needs were met because of the large number of items allocated per individual or family, the availability of items for children, the variety of products offered, and the proximity of the emergency food and clothing program.
 - Participants appreciated organizational characteristics such as the ability to select items, the warm and welcoming staff, the clarity of instructions, spacious location, the rapidity of distribution, and the availability of food and clothing at the same location.. The most important characteristics for participants were the ability to select preferred items and the positive and respectful attitude of employees.

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3. Few participants wished to see changes at the Good Shepherd. The few changes suggested were related to the organizational characteristics and the need to allocate more food and clothing items.
 - A very small number of participants suggested that registration and the waiting period should be improved.
 - Several participants wished to receive more fresh fruits and vegetables, more meat, more milk or dairy products as well as products that accommodate specific dietary needs.
4. Participants reported that if they had greater access to financial resources, they would no longer need to use the emergency food and clothing program:
 - Increased financial resources through full-time or part-time employment: some participants explained that their disability, their lack of English language skills or education and access to daycare are challenges that prevent them from securing part-time or full-time employment.
 - Increased funding from *Ontario Works* or *Ontario Disability Support Program*: some participants mentioned that affordable housing could improve their financial situation.

The findings of this study, together with the increased demand which prompted the study, suggest that the model of operations evaluated here places the Good Shepherd at the forefront of client-focused emergency food and clothing provision in Hamilton. Specifically, we identify these best practices.

The program is attractive because it

- Offers the ability to select the preferred food and clothing items is preferred to prepackaged items. Participants can take into account their food allergies, health concerns and preferences and they care about not wasting food.
- Retains respectful and friendly staff with a positive attitude who make the patrons feel good.
- Provides clear instructions for navigating the aisles, for food preparation, and for the maximum number of items allocated for single individuals and families.
- Offers the emergency program at a spacious and accessible setting with available parking.
- Ensures that the distribution of food and clothing items is rapid and fluid.
- Provides food and clothing at the same location.

The program addresses client needs by:

- Offering a large number of items allocated for single individuals and families.
- Offering children related items such as diapers, formula, toys and clothing for families.

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- Offering a wide range of food items, especially perishable products such as fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and dairy products, as well as lactose-free, sugar-free, preservative-free items for people with allergies and food sensitivities.
- Offering services close to where people in need live, possibly at walking-distance.

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