

2023  
2024

# MANITOULIN HUNGER REPORT

ANALYSIS OF FOOD INSECURITY  
ON MANITOULIN ISLAND



**Manitoulin  
Family Resources**  
Emergency Food Assistance

PREPARED BY VANESSA GLASBY  
MFR FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM SUPERVISOR  
EDITED BY PATRICIA MADER

MANITOULIN HUNGER REPORT 2023-2024

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# Acknowledgements



Thank You!  
Chi-miigwech!

We would like to extend our continuing gratitude to our incredible volunteers who make the work we do at the Manitoulin Family Resources (MFR) Food Bank possible. Without their dedication, we would not be able to operate at the capacity that we do. Whether it is packing food hampers, managing inventory, sorting donations, or working in the Treasures thrift store, we simply cannot thank our crew enough for their commitment to feeding our community. We have the best team!

# Executive Summary

Food bank use is on the rise all across the country, and our community is no exception. From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, the Manitoulin Family Resources Food Bank served a total of 4588 individuals (1635 households). This represents a 7.0% increase over 2022-23, and a 46.2% over 2018-2019 (pre-Covid times).

Among the 1635 households who visited during this time period, 28.0% had never visited the food bank before (a 1.4% increase over the number of new households in 2022-23). This number is similar to our pre-Covid rates, where approximately 28% of our clients each year would be first-time visitors.

As with last year's Manitoulin Hunger Report, the communities least represented in percentage of food bank visits are those located furthest from the MFR Food Bank, which is located in Mindemoya. This is most likely due to transportation barriers, which are explored further below in this report.



4588 Individuals Served

1635 Households

Up 7% over 2022-23  
reporting period

28% were first time  
visitors

## Executive Summary, cont.

Suze Morrison, of the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, noted in a 2023 news interview that, “wage discrimination[…], the historical impacts of colonization and residential schools, access to education and employment, and housing discrimination [are all factors at play]”[1] when it comes to the overrepresentation of Indigenous clientele at emergency food programs.

Individuals residing in one of Manitoulin Island’s First Nation communities made up 72.42% of all food bank visits in 2023-24 (compared to 68% in 2022-23). At the MFR Food Bank, (self-identified) Indigenous clients represent 52.2% of our clientele, despite making up approximately 40.6% of the total population of the Island. It is safe to say that our Indigenous community members are vastly overrepresented in our food bank statistics.

The three age groups most highly represented amongst food bank visitors were visitors ages 25-35 (17% of visitors), 7-13 (16% of visitors), and 36-50 (15% of visitors). The least represented age brackets were teenagers aged 14-17 (7%), and young adults aged 18-24 (8%). Nevertheless, children and youth still represented over 1/3 (36%) of all food bank visits in 2023-24. This is consistent with provincial and national averages, but represents an unfortunate reality for our youth.

More than 50% of clients visited only once or twice over the course of the year. MFR Food Bank support is available to clients every 28-days, or as needed, and may be offered more frequently in urgent situations (e.g., separation of family, unexpected expense, household emergency, etc.). While some of our clients require consistent support from our food bank, many simply need help making ends meet when expenses get too tight to bear.

# Food Purchasing

According to Feed Ontario, 1 in 7 food banks in the province purchase 20% or more of the food they distribute to their clients. MFR is one of these food banks. We purchase an estimated 49.3% of the food we distribute, though this percentage varies greatly depending on the time of year and grant funding available to our organization. Although our community is very supportive of our work, especially during our Christmas Hamper Campaign, we simply do not receive enough donations to feed everyone who needs it. We spend many thousands of dollars each month on food items, excluding items we receive through Feed Ontario's Full Shelves and Smarter Needs Allocation Programs (SNAP), as these items are provided to us "free" of cost through our membership in Feed Ontario. The total value of food that moves through our food bank each month is estimated to be around \$13,000 at the time of writing this report. This is exclusive of our Christmas Hamper Campaign, which alone channels more than \$100,000 worth of food to Manitoulin Island families in the month of December each year.



# Land Acknowledgement

Aanii.

As visitors on this land, we have an important responsibility to acknowledge the grounds on which we, as Manitoulin Family Resources, are privileged to operate. We also acknowledge the historical impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples, including the historical and ongoing intersection of food insecurity with the legacy of colonialism.

Manitoulin Family Resources is located in the traditional and treaty territory of the Anishnabek Nation, specifically the Odawa, Ojibway, and Pottawatomi Peoples, known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The modern Odawa name for the territory we operate on is Mnidoo Mnising[2]. This land is part of the Robinson-Huron Treaty (1850) & Manitoulin Island Treaty (1836) territory. The Manitoulin Island Treaty “represented a relinquishing of the Crown’s claim to Indigenous lands [and] recognized and protected Indigenous sovereignty over Manitoulin Island”[3].

We believe that it is not only important to recognize the Anishnabek Nation for their care for, and teachings about the earth and our relations, but to honor those teachings through our interactions today and every day hereafter.

In light of this history and understanding of our role as Treaty People, may we dedicate ourselves to moving forward in the spirit of partnership, collaboration, and reconciliation, as we learn together and contemplate the possibilities that lie ahead[3].

Chi-miigwech.

*\*Acknowledgement based on an example from Mitchell Huguenin - How to Do A Land Acknowledgement - Trent University [4]*

# About Our Organization

Manitoulin Family Resources (MFR) is a non-profit agency that supports individuals and families by providing resources, advocacy, support, and education for those in need through the agency's three program areas: Children's Services, Violence Against Women Prevention, and Emergency Food Assistance. The MFR Food Bank is now the main operation of the Emergency Food Assistance program.

The Food Bank found its origins through the work of the Violence Against Women Prevention program. Opening in 1984, Haven House Shelter provided a safe space for women and their children who were experiencing or were at risk of experiencing violence. In many cases, women came to the shelter with very few belongings after having to quickly flee their homes. In response, staff began collecting donations of clothing and other basic necessities to give to shelter residents who were in need.

With no designated space for storing items and little time for staff to manage incoming donations, it quickly became apparent that more resources were needed. Starting as a small room in a portable building, the Help Centre took roots. Donations were sorted by a group of dedicated volunteers, and sold at affordable prices to those within and outside the shelter. With funds raised and thanks to the generous support of our community, a food bank was added to meet the needs of Help Centre clients.

Over the years the Help Centre has grown and changed, improving its infrastructure and services by adding more storage space and improving refrigeration and freezer capacity to allow for the storage of perishable foods. During this time, the agency was able to tap into a variety of funding avenues including grants from Food Banks Canada and Manitoulin Sudbury District Services Board (MSDSB) to continue improving operations.

MFR has been a member of Feed Ontario, the province's largest collective of hunger relief organizations, since 2013. Joining this collective gave MFR access to a number of tools to aid in things like client intake, food acquisition, and training, as well as a standard of practice designed to improve the overall quality of services.

## About Our Organization, cont.

After seeing a significant jump in Food Bank use and added challenges with the onset of the COVID-19 virus, staff began to discuss what changes would need to be made in order to maintain Food Bank operations. In the Fall of 2020, Manitoulin Family Resources was presented with an opportunity to build a brand-new food bank and thrift store and got to work designing a new building.

In late 2022, and with the help of many volunteers, the new Help Centre opened its doors for the first time. In this new space, MFR has been able to offer expanded services including the provision of culturally-significant foods for Indigenous clients[4], deliveries to Community Hub partners for clients without access to reliable transportation[5], distribution of fresh, local produce thanks to partnerships with local farmers and growers, and Starter Home Kits (containing bedding, towels, and basic kitchen items) for clients who have secured housing but require support furnishing the space.

As of the writing of this report, the MFR Food Bank supports an average of 371 clients per month, excluding our Christmas Hamper Campaign which, in 2023, supported 1668 individuals from 750 households. If we were to include our Christmas Hamper Campaign, it would bring our monthly average number of visits to 510 individuals.

[5, 6] Funding provided by Food Banks Canada.

## Disclaimer About This Report

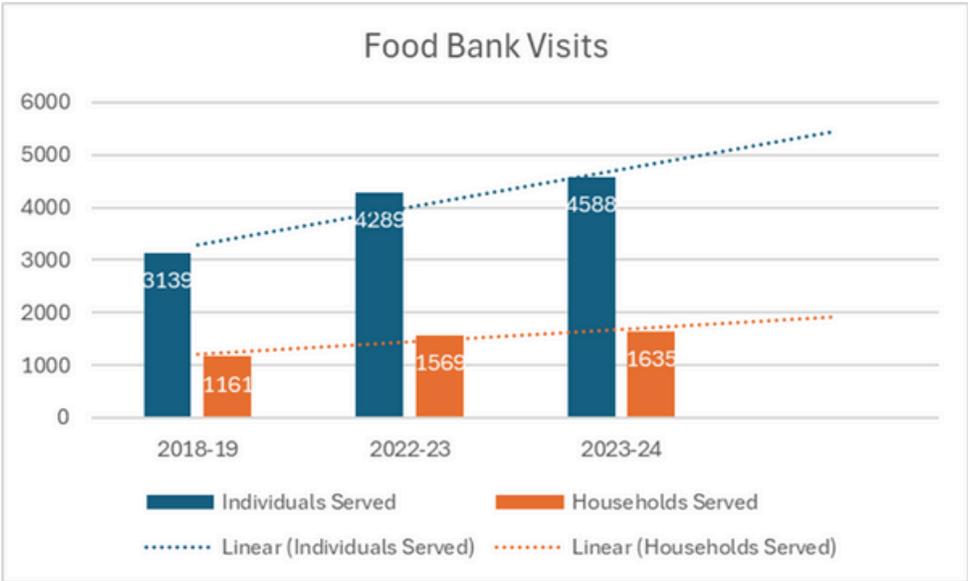
The aim of this report is to share knowledge with the wider Island community in an effort to promote meaningful discussion and collaboration, and to advocate for change with the ultimate goal of ending food insecurity on Manitoulin Island.

The summaries in this report are based on data collected from the Manitoulin Family Resources Food Bank. We recognize that the MFR Food Bank is one of several hunger relief initiatives on Manitoulin Island, and therefore the information presented is not representative of all food insecure households or food security and sovereignty initiatives in our region.

# Food Bank Statistics 2023-2024

## Food Bank Usage

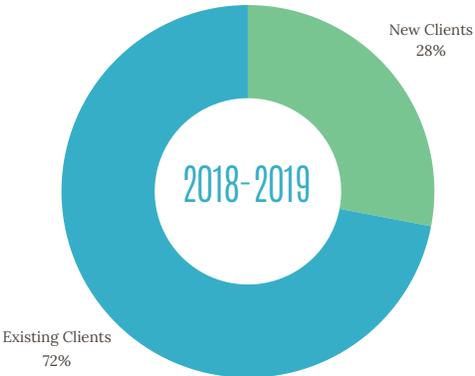
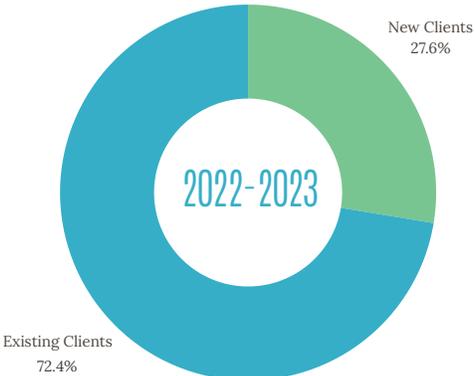
From 2022-23 to 2023-24, we saw a 7% increase in individuals served at our food bank, with a total of 4,588 visits. Our busiest month was August 2023, in which we saw a total of 495 visits. The 2023-24 year represented a 46.2% increase over our pre-Covid rates of food bank usage, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down. As in most other parts of Ontario, food bank usage is on the rise here on Manitoulin.



Food Bank Visits					
	2023-24	2022-23	2018-19	% Increase / Decrease 2022-23 to 2023-24	% Increase / Decrease 2018-19 to 2023-24
<b>Individuals Served*</b>	4588	4289	3139	7.0%	46.2%
<b>Households Served*</b>	1635	1569	1161	4.2%	40.8%

\* The figures above indicate duplicate visits, meaning multiple visits from the same individuals and households are counted. This data does not include food support offered through the MFR Christmas Hamper campaign.

# New Versus Existing Clients



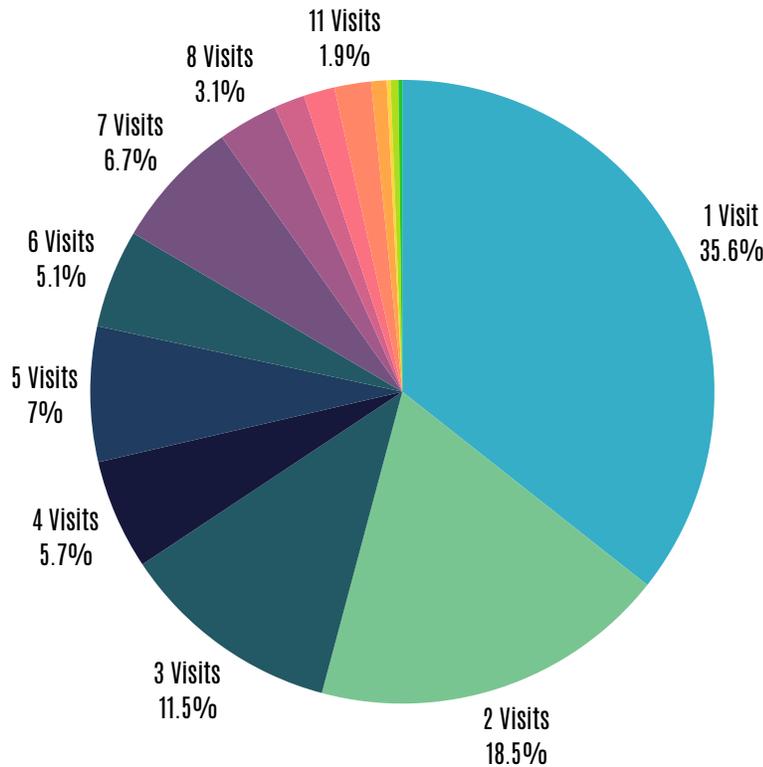
## Number of Clients Served at MFR Food Bank:

- 371 per month on average.
- 1668 Individuals during holiday campaign.

We have seen a slight decrease in the percentage of existing clients visiting our food bank, and a relatively stable percentage of new clients visiting our food bank each year since 2018-19. The decline in existing clients could be due to factors such as clients moving off-Island, securing a more stable financial position (e.g., a higher-paying job), or clients passing away. The roughly 28% of households who are new to the food bank each year may be those new to the area, or simply those who have found themselves in a more precarious financial situation than they were previously.

	2023-24	2022-23	2018-19	% Increase / Decrease 2022-23 - 2023-24	% Increase / Decrease 2018-19 - 2023-24
<b>New</b>	28%	27.6%	28%	1.4%	0.0%
<b>Existing</b>	66%	72.4%	72%	-8.8%	-8.3%
<b>Anonymous</b>	6%	0%	0	N/A	N/A

# Frequency of Client Visits Annually



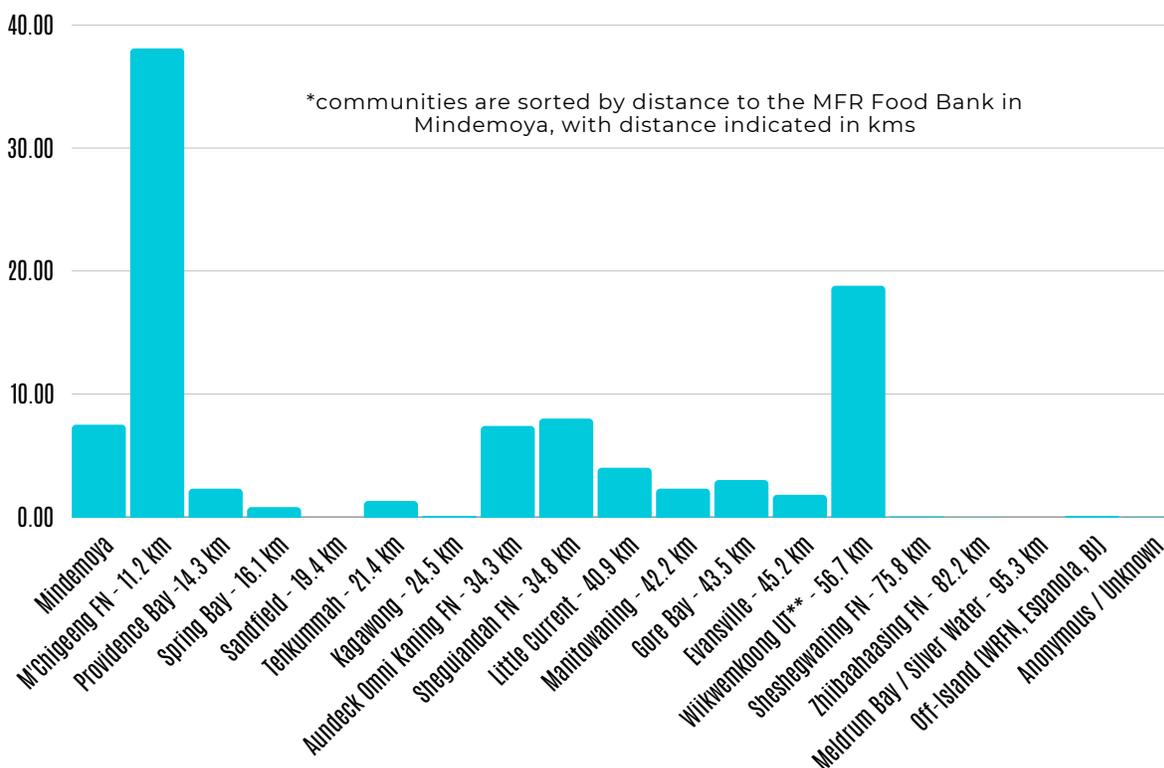
Number of Visits Per Year	Number of Clients	% of Clients
1	464	35.6%
2	242	18.5%
3	150	11.5%
4	74	5.7%
5	92	7.0%
6	67	5.1%
7	88	6.7%
8	40	3.1%
9	21	1.6%
10	21	1.6%
11	25	1.9%
12	10	0.8%
13	3	0.2%
14	5	0.4%
15	3	0.2%

\* The number / percentage of clients who have visited X number of times in the year

Although it is available to them once every 4-weeks (28-days), many of our food bank clients do not require emergency food support every month. In fact, over half of our clients (roughly 58%) required support only once or twice in the 2023-24 year. Many of our clients live paycheck to paycheck. They are able to make ends meet most months, but are unable to withstand unexpected expenses.

Some clients required assistance more than the recommended once per month. Although this is the standard for the MFR Food Bank, exceptions can be made in certain circumstances (e.g., large unexpected expense, household emergency, sudden relocation, homelessness, etc.). This is why a small percentage of clients are seen to have visited 13+ times in the chart above.

## Usage By Community 2023-2024



Communities served	% of total 2023-24	% of total 2022-23	% of total 2018-19	% Increase / Decrease 2022-23 - 2023-24	% Increase / Decrease 2018-19 - 2023-24
M'Chigeeng FN	38.1	27.2	23.5	40.1%	62.1%
Wiikwemkoong UT**	18.8	23.4	32.8	-19.7%	-42.7%
Mindemoya	7.5	8.9	6.3	-15.7%	19.0%
Aundeck Omni Kaning FN	7.4	8.9	4.6	-16.9%	60.9%
Shegiandah FN	8	6.9	6.8	15.9%	17.6%
Gore Bay	3	6.6	1.9	-54.5%	57.9%
Little Current	4	5.1	5.5	-21.6%	-27.3%
Providence Bay	2.3	2	2.2	15.0%	4.5%
Manitowaning	2.3	1.8	3.2	27.8%	-28.1%
Tehkummah	1.3	1.8	3	-27.8%	-56.7%
Spring Bay	0.8	1.5	0.01	-46.7%	7900.0%
Zhiibaahaasing FN	0.01	0.8	0.5	-98.8%	-98.0%
Evansville	1.8	0.8	0.4	125.0%	350.0%
Sheshegwaning FN	0.04	0.5	0.3	-92.0%	-86.7%
Kagawong	0.09	0.3	0.8	-70.0%	-88.8%
Meldrum Bay / Silver Water	0.004	0.3	0.5	-98.7%	-99.2%
Sandfield	0	0.3	0	-100.0%	
Off-Island (WRFN, Espanola, BI)	0.07	3.1	4.1	-97.7%	-98.3%
Anonymous / Unknown	0.02	0	3.7		

\* Figures include visits by individuals (vs. by households).

\*\* In recent years, the Wiikwemkoong Ontario Works Office began offering food bank services to the community as a member of Feed Ontario.

## Food Bank Use by Age Group

Percentage of Visits by Age Group

	2023-24	2022-23	2018-19	% Increase / Decrease 2022-23 - 2023-24	% Increase / Decrease 2018-19 - 2023-24
<b>0-6 years</b>	13	15.9	15	-18.2%	-13.3%
<b>7-13 years</b>	16	17.5	15.7	-8.6%	1.9%
<b>14-17 years</b>	7	6.4	5.8	9.4%	20.7%
<b>18-24 years</b>	8	9.2	8.9	-13.0%	-10.1%
<b>25-35 years</b>	17	18.1	18	-6.1%	-5.6%
<b>36-50 years</b>	15	16	18.2	-6.3%	-17.6%
<b>51-59 years</b>	11	8.5	9	29.4%	22.2%
<b>60+ years*</b>	12	8.4	9.3	42.9%	29.0%
<b>Anonymous</b>	2		0.003		199900.0%

\* Seniors are generally the demographic at lowest risk of needing the support of a food bank, however, we have seen a consistent rise in the number of seniors accessing the MFR Food Bank. Provincially, they are the fastest growing demographic of food bank users, according to Feed Ontario. Although many of Ontario's seniors are financially secure, that security can be fragile. This demographic rarely experiences a positive change in their economic situation (e.g., a higher-paying job). This, coupled with rising inflation and costs of living, makes for a precarious situation for our most senior members of society.

Number of Children in Household\*

# of Children in Household	Number of Visits by Households of this Size	% of Visits by Households of this Size	% of Households with Children
0	929	57.1%	42.9%
1	238	14.6%	
2	169	10.4%	
3	163	10.0%	
4	94	5.8%	
5	7	0.4%	
6	12	0.7%	
7	13	0.8%	
8	2	0.1%	
9	0	0.0%	
10	0	0.0%	
11	1	0.1%	

\* The figures above indicate duplicate visits, meaning multiple visits from the same individuals and households are counted.

## Did you know?

Canada is the **only** G7 country that lacks a national school food program [9].

## Food Bank Use by Age Group, Cont.

While no one should have to live in poverty, children are of special concern to food banks. Adequate nutrition is essential for a child's development and a lack of sufficient, healthy food can have severe impacts on an individual's long-term health and wellbeing. Federally, 33% of food bank clients are children, but represent only 20% of the population. In 2023-24, children represented 36% of the visitors to the MFR Food Bank, putting us above the federal average. Encouragingly, we have seen a decrease in the rate of visits from children ages 0-13. Unfortunately, this has coincided with a 9.4% increase in the rate of teenagers (aged 14-17) visiting the food bank.

MFR is pleased to announce that we are one of the lucky recipients of Food Banks Canada's After the Bell Program for 2024. This program will provide us with a weekly package of shelf-stable foods for each child we serve, plus funding to purchase fresh foods (i.e., fruits & vegetables) to add to the packs. This program is designed to help families feed their children during the summer months when school snack & meal programs are not available. We are incredibly grateful to Food Banks Canada for this opportunity to better support our community's children.

## Food Bank Use and Income Source

Primary Income Source of Main Household Earner\*

Income Source	% of Total Clients			Comparative Rates		% Increase / Decrease 2022-23 to 2023-24	% Increase / Decrease 2018-19 to 2023-24
	2023-24	2022-23	2018-19	Provincial Rate <sup>7</sup>	Federal Rate <sup>8</sup>		
Ontario Works	30.2	39.9	45.4	25.5	42.4	-24.3%	-33.5%
ODSP	21.9	23.7	26.2	28.3		-7.6%	-16.4%
Private Disability	0.01	0.2	0.0	0.4		-95.0%	
Child Tax Benefit	2.6	5.0	11.4			-48.0%	-77.2%
Child Support	0.01	0.4	0.0			-97.5%	0.0%
Spousal/Family Support	0	0.2	0.0			-100.0%	
Employment Insurance (EI)	1.8	4.0	26.8	2.4		-55.0%	-93.3%
Employed (Part-Time)	3.4	3.7	26.9	17.1		-8.1%	-87.4%
Employed (Full-Time)	3.4	2.3	0.9			47.8%	277.8%
Pensions**	8.9	6.0	10.9	9.0		48.3%	-18.3%
Student Loans	0	0.2	0.0	2.0		-100.0%	
Other / Anonymous	14.6	6.2	0.9	N/A		135.5%	1522.2%
No Income	12.2	8.7	10.3	N/A		40.2%	18.4%

\* These statistics exclude individuals whose income was "unknown" due to them not being the primary client on the household's file, or the primary household earner.

\*\* In this chart, responses of "Pensions", "OAS", and "CPP" have been combined.

# Food Bank Use and Household Sizes

## Household Sizes\*

# of Household Members	Number of Visits by Households of this Size	% of Visits by Households of this Size	Estimated Cost per Hamper of this Size**
1	603	36.6%	\$63.66
2	322	19.6%	\$77.18
3	152	9.2%	\$100.36
4	219	13.3%	\$129.80
5	136	8.3%	\$158.80
6	122	7.4%	\$173.58+
7	54	3.3%	
8	17	1.0%	
9	11	0.7%	
10	6	0.4%	
11	2	0.1%	
12	0	0.0%	
13	1	0.1%	
14	1	0.1%	

\* The figures above indicate duplicate visits, meaning multiple visits from the same individuals / households are counted.

\*\* Costs accurate as of June 2024. Each hamper is intended to provide all household members with roughly 3-5 days' worth of food, though many clients stretch their hampers to last longer than this.

\$64

To provide an individual with 3-5 days worth of food.

\$100

To provide 3 individuals with 3-5 days worth of food.

\$173

To provide 6+ individuals with 3-5 days worth of food.

## Racial Identity

	% of Clients	Wikipedia Stats
Indigenous	52.2%	40.6%
White	11.0%	59.0%
Black	0.2%	0.4%
Other / Prefer not to Answer	0.5%	N/A
Unknown	36.2%	N/A

## Gender Identity

	% of Clients
Female	50.0%
Male	48.5%
Trans / Nonbinary / Other Gender	0.2%
Unknown / Prefer not to Answer	1.3%

## Disability Status\*

	Number of Clients	% of Clients
Yes	125	9.5%
No	148	11.3%
Unknown / Prefer not to Answer	1038	79.2%

\* Note – may not be inclusive of all clients living with a disability. Clients are asked if they self-identify as living with a disability, but may opt out of answering the question.

# Cost of Living Crisis

“Since 2022, Canadians have experienced unprecedented inflation in the prices of food and other necessities. If the incomes of lower income households do not keep up with these rising costs (e.g., through indexation of the wages and benefits upon which these households depend), we can expect the prevalence of severe food insecurity to worsen [10]”.

## Inflation

In a recent CBC article, Feed Ontario Executive Director, Carolyn Stewart, noted that the rising cost of living is having an impact both on food bank attendance and food bank donations[11]. Shelves that would once be stocked for 2-3 months are now only stocked for 2-3 weeks. We have noticed this at our MFR Food Bank; many of the individuals who used to donate occasionally just don't have the extra funds to do so anymore. As a result, MFR has had to spend more money purchasing food to keep shelves stocked. Thankfully, we have not yet had to turn any clients away without food, as some of our fellow food banks in other parts of Ontario have. As the CEO of Food Banks Mississauga, Meghan Nicholls, said in a 2023 article, “Eventually, there is going to be a breaking point [...] While food banks have been stepping up and meeting the need, there is not an eternal ability to do that”[12].

The provincial predictions are supported by the local data. In addition to food bank usage being on the rise locally, the makeup of primary household income sources for those accessing the foodbank is also changing. For example, data collected by the MFR Food Bank show that during last year's reporting period, (2022-2023) roughly 2.3% of local food bank clients reported having full-time employment as their income source. In this year's data (2023-24), that % has risen to 3.4%. For comparison, in the 2018-2019 reporting period, 0.9% of clients reported full-time employment as their primary income source. The difference between the two percentage figures for full-time employment income as a primary source, doesn't seem that large, but the percentage change (between 2018-2019 and 2023-2024) is very large (more than 277%).

## Inflation, Cont.

Another way to look at this trend is this: Of the 1161 households served by the foodbank in 2018-2019, approximately 10 indicated income from a full-time job as a primary source of income. By 2023-2024, approximately 55 of the 1635 household accessing the foodbank indicated full-time employment income as a primary source of income.

This trend data, both percentage-wise, and absolute, supports the provincial and national evidence, that inflation in the cost of food has outpaced inflation in many other areas, accounting for a disproportionate share of the average rate of inflation, and that even households with full-time employment are increasingly in need of support.

## Housing

As a highly sought after vacation spot, Manitoulin has seen a significant increase in short-term rental units. More and more real-estate owners have chosen this option over long-term lease agreements, perceiving short-term rentals to be financially lucrative, and lower risk than the long-term option. As a result of this and other factors, many households have been forced out of long-term, stable housing and into insecure situations. Some have moved back in with family, some sleep on friends' couches (aka "couch-surfing"), and some live in personal vehicles or seasonal trailers, most of which offer inadequate water access and climate control for safe habitation.

Housing has long been a driver of food bank use in Ontario. It is generally the single-largest expense for a household, and it is typically non-negotiable. One cannot skip a housing payment, so often households will instead skip or reduce other bills such as groceries in order to afford housing. Roughly two thirds of Feed Ontario survey respondents indicated they had less than \$100 leftover each month after paying their housing costs (i.e., mortgage or rent). Twenty-two percent of respondents indicated their housing costs exceeded their monthly income[13].

According to the 2024 Poverty Report Cards by Food Banks Canada[14], the cost of shelter in Ontario increased by 5.4% between December 2022 and December 2023. If you look at rent, specifically, the increase is even higher at 6.9%. Although these are both below the national average (6% for housing generally and 7.7% for rent), these rising costs are still making it more and more difficult for Ontarians to get ahead, with 41% of Ontarians reporting they find it difficult to keep up with rising rents, and 28% saying that it's difficult to find adequate, affordable housing at all.

## Housing, Cont.

A recent study out of McMaster University and Hamilton Food Share revealed that 46% of respondents indicated they would be at risk of losing their housing if they had to pay for the food they received from the food bank[15]. It is worth noting that this is not just a 'big city' problem. Between 2021 and 2022, the top 10 locations experiencing the highest rent increases in Ontario were all rural towns or smaller cities, according to Statistics Canada[16].

Ontario remains nowhere near its goal of building 1.5+ million more homes by 2031 in an effort to restore affordability to the housing market. Despite being in the midst of a clear housing crisis, the provincial government has not announced any new money or targets for the construction of affordable, rent-assisted housing in its most recent budget[17]. Ontario also has no comprehensive rent control (new residential buildings that were occupied for the first time on or after November 15, 2018 are not rent controlled[18]), and the Premier has rejected efforts to cooperate with the federal government on a renters' bill of rights.

The waitlist for those needing subsidized one-bedroom apartment units on Manitoulin Island alone, contains approximately 200 individuals currently, according to Donna Stewart, Chief Administrative Officer of Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (MSDSB) [19]. One of the issues identified by the MSDSB, a primary provider of subsidized housing in our area, is the difficulties in tracking and monitoring our underhoused population. Without this information, MSDSB struggles to explain the need for more social housing to its funders.

Unlike a larger centre, where underhoused individuals might be more easily found and met with in downtown cores or larger shelters, many of our underhoused neighbours on Manitoulin are harder to identify. Individuals might couch-surf, stay temporarily with family or friends, remain in hospital for extended periods of time, or be "housed" in inadequate settings such as seasonal cabins or uninsulated trailers.

## Housing, Cont.

In an effort to combat this lack of information, MSDSB has launched monthly By-Name List meetings in collaboration with several local agencies. In these meetings, agency representatives collaborate to identify and monitor underhoused individuals. With the consent of these individuals, their attendance at various agencies' programs is monitored (e.g., medical appointments, housing support meetings, food bank visits, etc.). Based on the information shared between agency workers, it can be determined whether the client is still in need of housing or whether they have, for example, secured housing, moved out of the region, or contact has been lost, and therefore they may be removed from the list. A discussion also takes place about how these individuals can best be provided supports such as helping them register for housing subsidies in the private rental market, connecting them with food support, referring them to various health services, or getting them items that might make their current living situation more comfortable at little or no cost (e.g., tents, sleeping bags, warm clothes, space heaters, etc.). It is our hope that this program will help us better identify and support underhoused individuals in our community.

## Lack of Public Transportation

A recent Food Banks Canada study identified physical barriers (e.g., lack of transportation, distance from a food bank) as one of the four main types of barriers clients face when trying to access food bank support[19]. This is especially true in our community. With a coverage area of roughly 2,766 square kilometres, the MFR Food Bank supports a wide range of households, many of whom are over an hour's driving distance away from our primary location in Mindemoya. There is no public transportation system on Manitoulin Island currently. Many of our clients also lack access to a personal vehicle, relying instead on rides from friends, hitchhiking, or expensive taxi rides to come pick up their food hampers.

Recognizing this barrier, and thanks to funding from Food Banks Canada, MFR is able to launch a Community Hub pilot program in the summer of 2024. This funding will allow MFR to hire two new employees – a driver and a food handler / assistant – and offer delivery to six community hubs around the Island, thereby bringing emergency food support that much closer to clients' homes. Some of the Community Hubs are able to offer delivery to clients' homes, while others will act as pickup depots. Funding has been secured to run the program until the end of August 2024, but our hope is that we can secure continued funding to run the program in continuity. Details on the results of the 2024 pilot program will be included in the 2024-2025 Hunger Report.

## Stigma

Hunger relief organizations such as food banks exist to help support those who are struggling, for whatever reason, to afford sufficient food. Unfortunately, not everyone who experiences food insecurity seeks help from a food bank.

A recent participatory action research[20] study by Food Banks Canada identified a number of barriers that impact individuals' decision to access (or not access) a food bank. The top barriers included "feeling ashamed" (54% of respondents), "feeling others need it more" (46%), and worry about "feeling unwelcome or judged" (41%)[21].

For Indigenous community members, stigma may be even more heightened. Indigenous clients must also contend with the "racist narratives that suggest Indigenous communities are already too dependent or receive more help than settler and especially white Canadians"[22].

Food banks need to make concerted efforts to reduce the stigma associated with accessing their services. In the Food Banks Canada study, one researcher noted that, while many research participants mentioned feeling "ashamed" or "embarrassed" for needing support, nearly every respondent's message to others was that they should not feel embarrassed or ashamed for needing help.

The study also noted that this stigma is especially prominent in rural and smaller communities, where anonymity is harder to maintain, and clients are more likely to run into someone they know, whether it is another client, a staff person, or a volunteer. Many study participants mentioned that "kind, welcoming, non-judgmental, helpful, encouraging [and friendly]" staff and volunteers made a huge difference in their experience of accessing emergency food support programs. MFR is strongly committed to client confidentiality and respect. All staff and volunteers are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement and complete HR training courses (e.g., Respect in the Workplace, AODA) prior to starting work at the food bank. In a small community such as ours, this is especially important to us.

## Social Isolation

According to a recent Feed Ontario survey, people who turn to food banks for support tend to have considerably weaker social networks than the average Canadian, with 34% of food bank recipients surveyed saying they “rarely” or “never” have people to depend on when they need it [23]. Although generally considered to be a strongly-connected community, residents of Manitoulin Island still experience periods of social isolation, which can exacerbate and worsen one’s experience of poverty.

Strong social networks help mitigate the impacts of poverty through the sharing of resources, provision of support (both emotional and material), and offers of assistance (e.g., transportation, childcare). Those living without access to these strong social networks might not have the same opportunities as those living within them, and may experience poorer health outcomes overall. Loneliness is associated with many unhealthy behaviours and symptoms, including an increased rate of smoking, physical inactivity, poor sleep, increased risk of cardiovascular disease, and a weakened immune system [24].

In the latest Feed Ontario Hunger Report, it was noted that a study out of the UK demonstrated that one of the unique advantages to using a food bank (compared to accessing a service run by the state), was the “supportive, flexible, and non-bureaucratic approach that volunteers had when interacting with visitors”[25]. Although food banks cannot and should not replace adequate income and social support programs, they might still have a role to play in creating community and connection across socioeconomic boundaries.



# Structural & Systemic Issues

Although charitable food programs have been the primary response to household food insecurity in Canada since at least the 1980s, they were designed to be temporary and there has been no meaningful decline in the prevalence of food insecurity across the country. In 2021, almost 1 in 6 people (in the ten provinces measured) lived in a food-insecure household [26]. Food insecure households are rarely only compromising on their food purchases in order to make ends meet, and ongoing food insecurity has significant health consequences that extend beyond poor nutrition. Keeping the spotlight exclusively on food distracts us from policy interventions such as improved wages, income supports, adequate housing access and affordability, that would help our clients better meet their basic needs in the long-term.



## Inadequate Social Safety Net

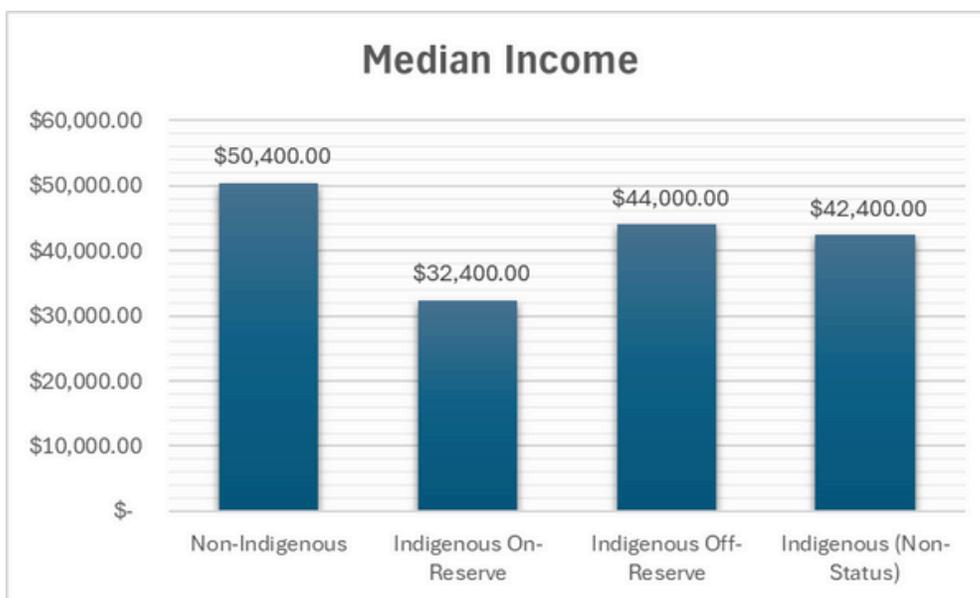
An effective social safety net should ideally ensure that no person drops below a certain threshold of poverty. Unfortunately, in Canada, many are falling through the cracks.

Social assistance remains the primary source of income for the majority of food bank visitors. Provincially, 26% of food bank visitors rely on Ontario Works (OW) as their primary source of income and 28% rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). At our food bank, 30.2% of visitors rely on OW, and 21.9% rely on ODSP. Interestingly, these rates are lower than what our food bank saw in 2022-23 or 2018-19, but we have seen simultaneous increases in rates of employed individuals and pensioners requesting food support.

## Precarious Employment

Over one third of Ontario's population (around 36%) has difficulty accessing stable employment in their community. This statistic is 6% higher than the national figure [29]. On Manitoulin Island, specifically, much of the work is seasonal, with many individuals employed full-time (or more than full-time) in the summer months, but laid off in the winter. Many are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits, but struggle to make ends meet on this reduced wage. According to the 2023 Feed Ontario Hunger Report, people working contract or seasonal positions are four times more likely to rely on a food bank, while those working part-time jobs are three times more likely [30]. Surprisingly, we tend to see higher rates of attendance at the food bank in the summer months, when employment is more readily available, but this may be due to other factors, such as increased difficulty accessing transportation in the winter months.

Fortunately, Ontario continues to have one of the highest minimum wages in the country at \$16.55/hr., though it still trails behind the federal minimum wage (\$17.30/hr.) and remains below levels considered "livable". At MFR, we have seen a 47.8% increase in the number of clients with full-time employment accessing the food bank since 2022-23, and a 277.8% increase from our 2018-19 numbers. Unfortunately, one of the stark realities of the current affordability crisis is that having a job is no longer a guarantee of economic security. According to a recent study, over 16% of Canadians spend all of their net pay every month, while roughly 30% spend their net pay and more, leading them more and more into debt [31]. With numbers like this, it's easy to see why food bank use is on the rise.



## Indigenous Overrepresentation

In its 2024 Poverty Report Cards, Food Banks Canada identified that “racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers often face disproportionate levels of poverty and exclusion that amplify [other social issues such as growing income inequality, housing inaccessibility, and systemic barriers to socio-economic opportunities]”[32].

Indigenous adults (16+) are more than twice as likely to experience low incomes as other groups[33]. In Ontario, non-indigenous people have higher incomes than all groups of Indigenous people. Non-indigenous Canadians have a median income of \$50,400. Indigenous people living on-reserve have a median income of \$32,400. Indigenous people living off-reserve have a median income of \$44,000. Non-status Indigenous peoples have a median income of \$42,400.

At our MFR Food Bank, Indigenous clients make up 52.2% of our clientele, despite making up approximately 40.6% of the total population. For contrast, White clients represent 11% of total Food Bank clientele, despite making up 59% of the total population. Federally, the percentage of Indigenous people accessing a food bank in 2023 was 12%, though they represent only 5% of the general population. Among the general population, nearly half (48%) of Indigenous persons reported having gone hungry at least once in 2023 due to lack of money for food, compared to 15% of the white population[34]. It is clear that Indigenous individuals are over-represented at food banks across the country, and MFR is no exception.

# Conclusion

“The food bank model is one that is fundamentally designed to respond to an emergency need, but emergencies are supposed to end. Instead, hunger is becoming an accepted ‘new normal’ in our province, and food banks are becoming a way to subsidize governments’ balanced budgets and corporations’ profit margins. This is not sustainable. While a high level of food bank use is unacceptable in and of itself, we are at the precipice of something much worse. As a province, we cannot let ‘hunger’ be normal. This is not acceptable today and it is not the future we want for our children and their families.”

- Carolyn Stewart, CEO Feed Ontario

As is the case with most food banks in Ontario, the MFR Food Bank has, once again, seen an increase in the number of visits year-over-year. Although food banks were originally designed to be a stop-gap solution to respond to a time of increased need, they have since become a staple of our society, with many households reliant on their support in order to keep food on the table. Frighteningly, they (along with emergency food programs like soup kitchens) are often considered to be the solution to addressing food insecurity.

If the contributing factors and systemic issues outlined above are left unaddressed, food bank visits will only continue to rise. The ongoing cost of living crisis, lack of affordable housing, nonexistent public transportation system, precarious employment opportunities, and inadequate social safety net are keeping hundreds of Manitoulin families from being able to meet their basic needs every month. Unfortunately, the social stigma associated with accessing a food bank keeps many of these families from accessing the services they need.

## Conclusion, cont.

Last year's Manitoulin Hunger Report noted that, "with limited resources, it is very likely that this need will begin to outpace what food banks like [the] Manitoulin Family Resources Food Bank are capable of supporting". To date, the MFR Food Bank has not had to turn anyone requesting emergency food support away due to a lack of available food, and we are very proud of this. We are, however, seeing a continued rise in the number of visits, with no signs of slowing down. This, coupled with a stark decrease in the quantity of donations coming in to the food bank makes for an alarming forecast for our organization.

To reiterate last year's report, "we must combine emergency food assistance with long-term, sustainable solutions to issues experienced by those walking [through] our doors" in order to achieve food security and eliminate hunger in our community. We need local municipal, provincial, and federal representatives to help us advocate for wraparound supports and policy shifts to address the major systemic issues that are keeping our community members in a state of poverty and food insecurity.

We cannot do this on our own and we are, by no means, the ultimate solution to hunger in our community. Our hope is that, one day, our services will no longer be required. Until that day, we will continue to be here to support those who need it.

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MANITOULIN  
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We thank you for your  
continued support in  
our efforts to feed our  
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## Contact

Vanessa Glasby  
Food Security Program Supervisor  
P.O. BOX 181 | MINDEMOYA, ON | P0P 1S0

[www.mfresources.net/contact/](http://www.mfresources.net/contact/)  
[vglasby@mfresources.net](mailto:vglasby@mfresources.net)  
[helpcentre@mfresources.net](mailto:helpcentre@mfresources.net)

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