



# The Hunger Report

**A Demographic Overview of the  
Good Food Centre's Members from  
September 2013 – July 2014**

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# The Good Food Centre

## The Hunger Report

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## Introduction

The Good Food Centre has been providing emergency food relief to the Ryerson community for over 20 years. As one of the oldest post-secondary food relief programs in Canada, the service has been housed in multiple locations and under multiple names. From a grassroots effort championed by a few vocal students to a fully funded service under the RSU umbrella, the Good Food Centre has emerged as a leader in post-secondary food insecurity.

This year marks a significant turning point for the Good Food Centre. With a newly renovated and larger space, new name, and new emphasis on quality food procurement, the Good Food Centre is working towards changing the conversation about post-secondary food insecurity at Ryerson University and on a national level. As the Good Food Centre has learned through our own members, simple hunger relief is not enough. Food security, social justice, and sustainability must all be considered to ensure the most holistic and dignified support possible.

The statistics in this report, although important, most likely only illustrate a small fraction of the food insecurity occurring at Ryerson University. These numbers only reflect the realities of those accessing the Good Food Centre services. Those students, staff, and faculty who did not access the Good Food Centre services in 2013/2014 due to embarrassment, fear of judgement, or lack of awareness about the service are not reflected in this report.

Compiling and sharing this information is part of the Good Food Centre's new strategy to better track food insecurity at Ryerson. The information presented was combined from member intake forms and compiled by a small and dedicated group of staff and volunteers.

## About the Service

As one of the Ryerson Student's Union five student run equity services, the Good Food Centre (GFC) provides hunger relief for those struggling with financial obligations, poverty, and underemployment. Through the food bank program, Ryerson community members can collect a three day supply of non-perishable food items and fresh produce once a week. The Good Food Box program, coordinated through FoodShare Toronto, offers members the ability to purchase produce on a weekly basis from sustainable farmers free from retail markups. During the spring and summer months, the GFC also coordinates the RSU community garden where volunteers participate in growing and harvesting produce that is then distributed through the food bank program. Along with providing access to food for those struggling with hunger, the GFC also aims to build community, advocate for food justice, and provide resources and education regarding healthy eating, food security, and poverty.

# Food Security

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as the following:

“a condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”

As emphasized by the above definition, food security is not simply about having enough food. Rather, it is about having enough of the right foods. In this respect, food security takes an equity and anti-oppression framework that looks to challenge systemic barriers to accessing food while also ensuring that each individual has access to food that is appropriate to them by their own definition of appropriate.

While rather comprehensive, this definition falls short on addressing the production aspect of food. How is the person(s) producing the food implicated? Are their human rights being honoured? What are the environmental effects of the foods being produced? This is where the Five A's of food security become relevant:

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## The Five A's of Food Security

### Availability

Sufficient food for all people at all times

### Accessibility

Physical and economic access to food for all at all times

### Acceptability

Access to culturally acceptable food, which is produced and obtained in ways that do not compromise people's dignity, self-respect or human rights

### Agency

The policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security

### Adequacy

Access to food that is nutritious and safe, and produced in environmentally sustainable ways

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By addressing the above variables, food security acts an umbrella term that ultimately advocates for equity in all aspects of food from seed to consumption. This allows for a holistic analysis of the food system while acknowledging the individual needs, knowledges, and experiences of all people in relation to food.

Food security is about more than hunger as the above definitions illustrate. It is a micro, mezzo, and macro approach for building a more inclusive and dignified food system. These principles guide the work of the Good Food Centre and many food relief/justice/security organizations across the country.



# The Report

**912**

Hours of service in 2013/2014

**422**

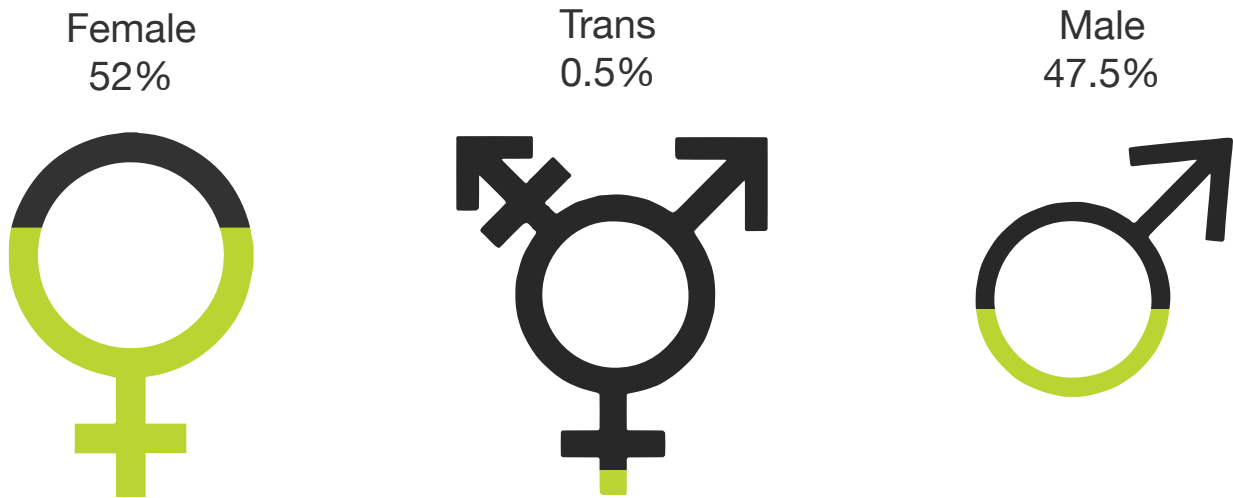
Ryerson recorded community members experienced food insecurity between September 2013 and July 2014

**2,528**

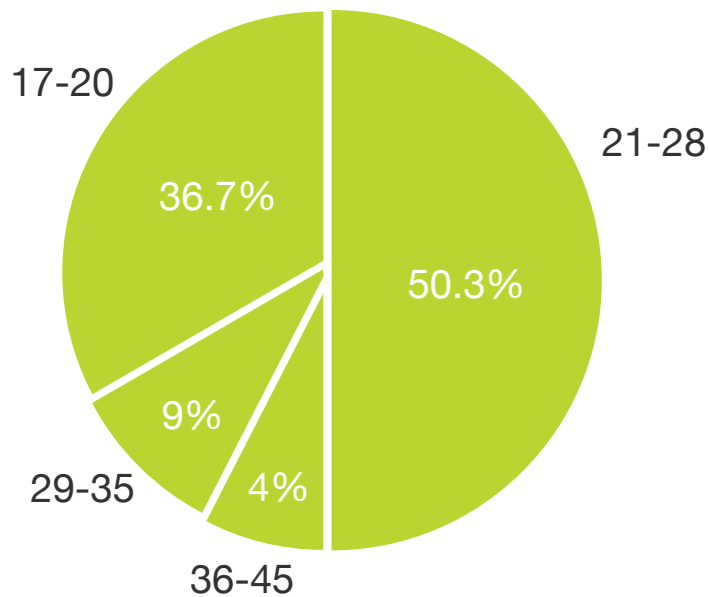
Visits to receive emergency food relief occurred in 2013/2014

## Good Food Centre Member Demographics

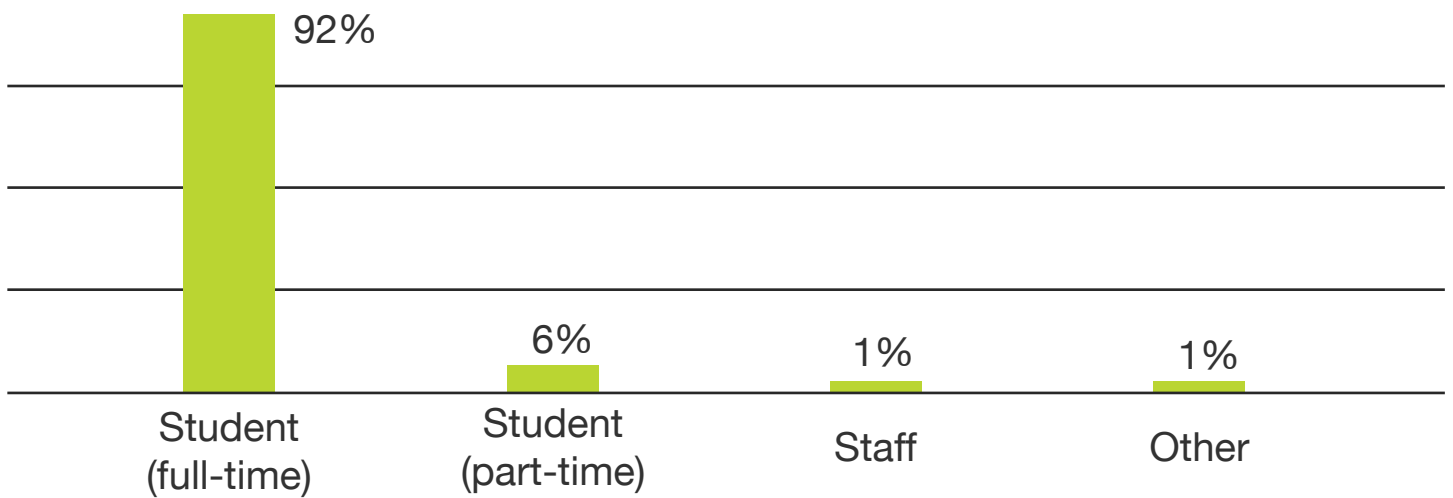
### Gender



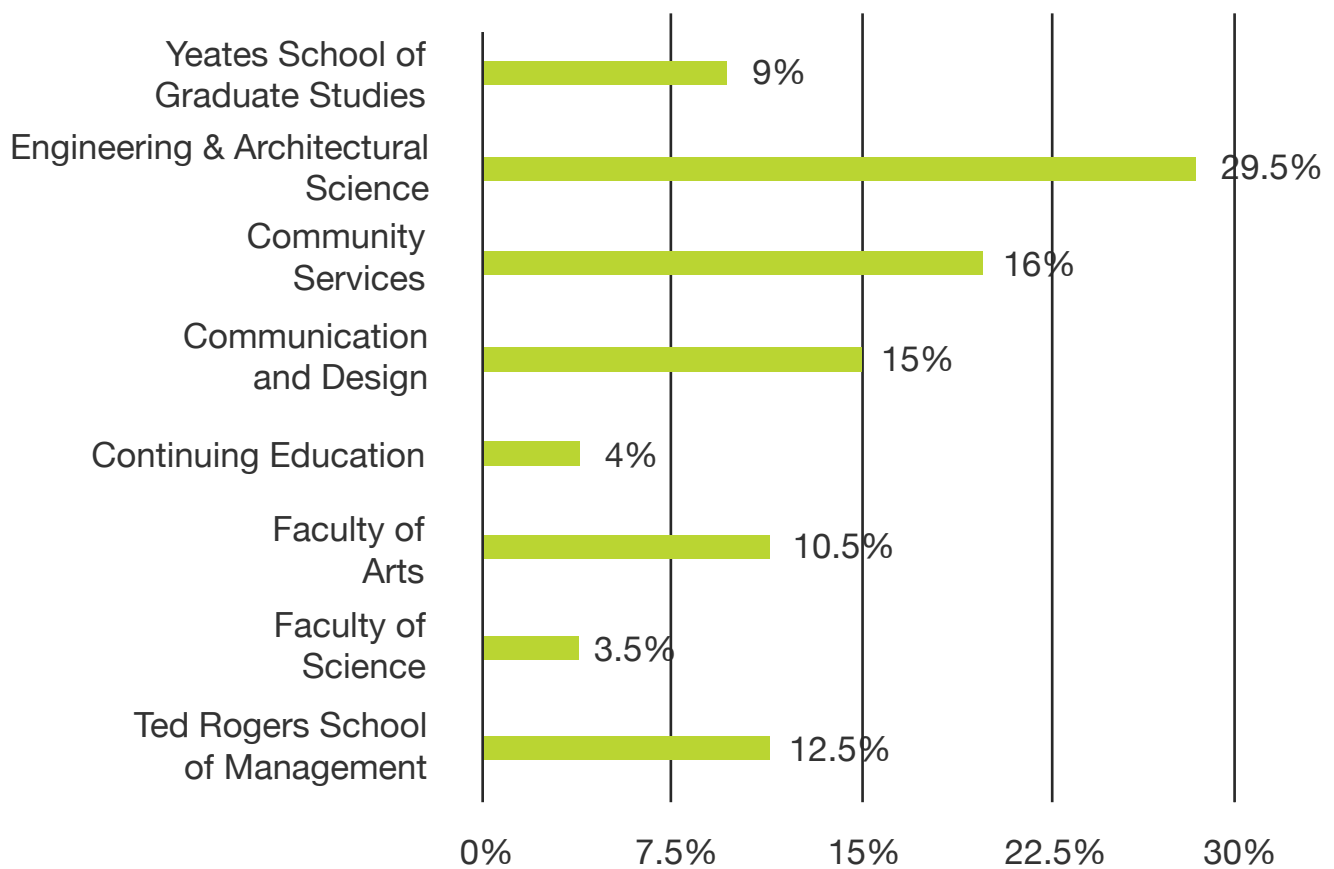
### Age



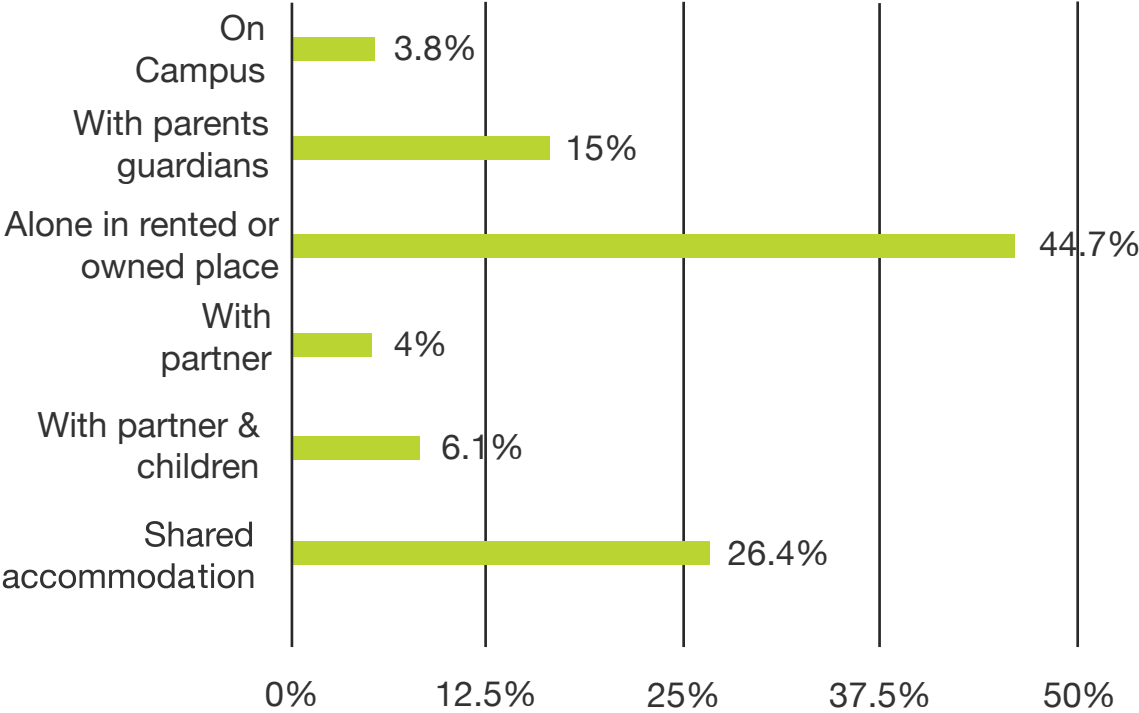
## Community Member Type



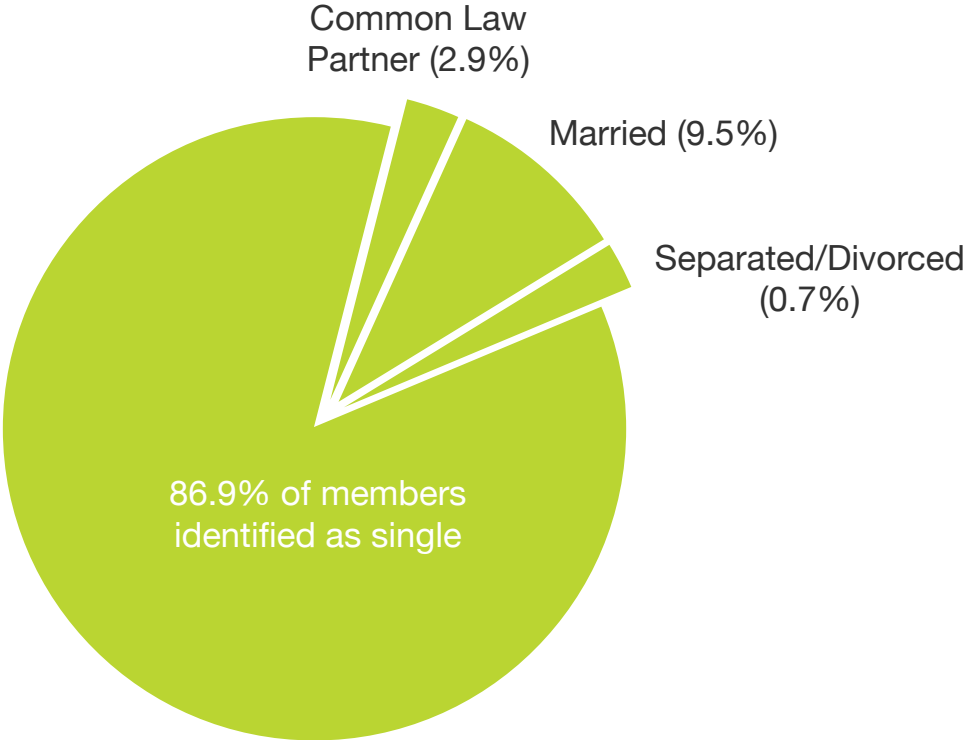
## Faculty Usage



# Living Arrangements

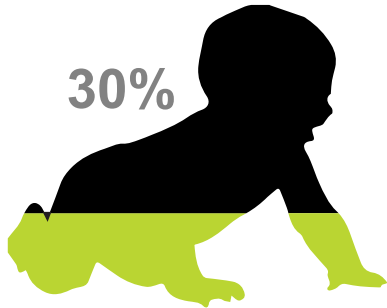


# Relationship Status

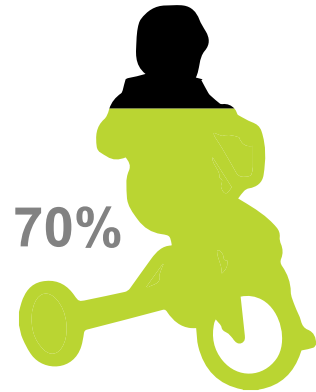


## Parental Status

10% of members were parents



of members children were under 2 years old

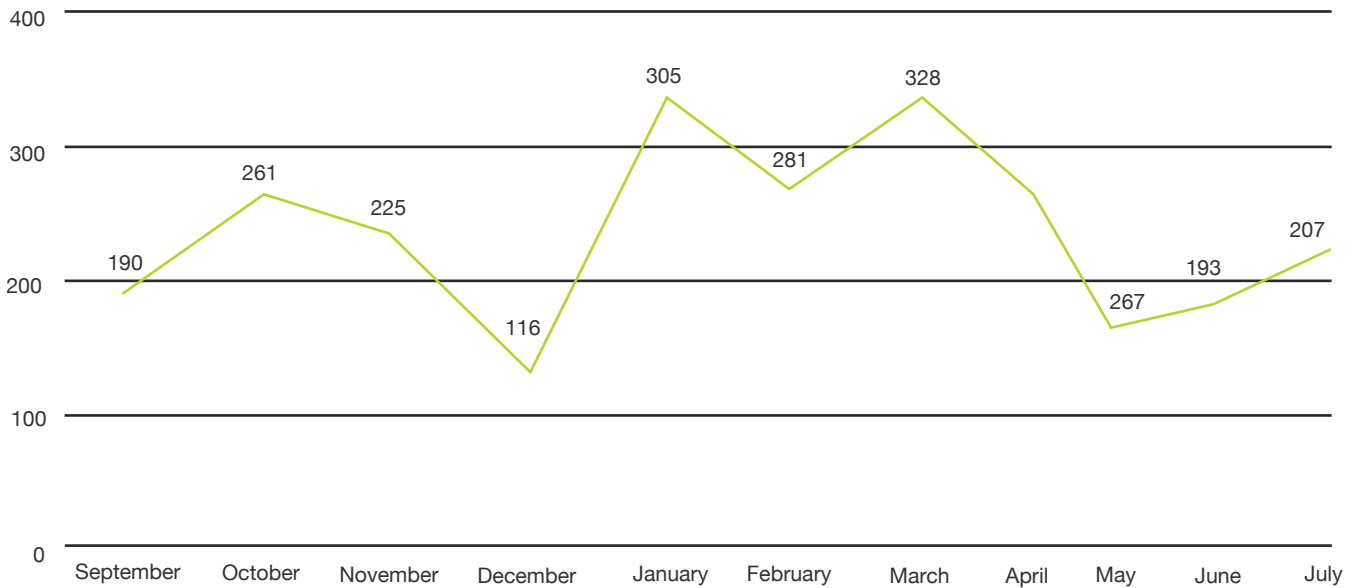


of members children were over 2 years old

## Dietary Restrictions

11% of users followed a vegetarian or vegan diet.

## Visits per Month





## Demographic Analysis

### *Gender*

In 2013/2014, 52% of the Good Food Centre's users identified as being female. This is above the provincial rate at 45.3% and above the national rate at 48.1% of women who access food banks. While this number cannot be generalized to the whole of Ryerson's population, we believe that this number might point to women experiencing greater barriers when pursuing post-secondary education. More research is needed in order to clarify this hypothesis.

**52% of the  
Good Food  
Centres's users  
identified as  
female**

### *Age*

50.3% of the Good Food Centre's users were between the ages of 21-28 in 2013/2014, and 36.7% were between 17 to 20 years old. In Canada, the majority of users are under the age of 44 (69%) with the 2 to 34 year old age group making up the highest percentage of this total. People between the ages of 20-34 also experienced the highest prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

### *Parental Status*

**10% of the  
members at the  
Good Food  
Centre were  
parents**

10% of members at The Good Food Centre in 2013/2014 were parents. 30% of parents had children under the age of 2 and 70% of parents had children over the age of 2. This possibly illustrates that parents of newborns do not have the financial capacities to attend post-secondary school due to the additional high costs of childcare and essential infant products. However, it is also possible that parents of newborns have prioritized their children's early development over attending post-secondary school. We believe that it is most likely a combination of the above circumstances that explain the difference in the age of food bank members' children.

### *Household Type*

46.1% of food bank users in Ontario were from single person households in 2014.<sup>1</sup> This is in line with The Good Food Centre statistics as 44.7% of our users reported as living alone.

### *Faculty Usage*

At 29.5%, students from the Faculty of Engineering & Architectural Science comprised the largest number of Good Food Centre members from any faculty. At Ryerson, on average, the Faculty of Engineering & Architectural Science has the highest tuition fees, ranging from \$9,421 - \$10,198 per year. This is, in some cases, \$3000 more than programs in other facilities. We suspect that due to the high tuition fees, that students of the Faculty of Engineering and Architectural Science are experiencing a higher degree of food insecurity when compared against all other facilities.

At 16%, students from the Faculty of Community Services comprised the second largest number of Good Food Centre members from any faculty. While there is no data to support this, we believe that these numbers could be reflected by the economic and class backgrounds of those attracted to community service professions. Many students are attracted to the fields of social work, disability, nursing, and child and youth care due to lived experiences that foster a drive for social change. As the Faculty of Community Services has average to low tuition fee rates when compared against other faculties, we believe that there is a strong possibility that students in this faculty are from economically marginalized backgrounds.

### *Visits per Month*

Roughly 13,000 Ryerson students rely on the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to fully or partially cover their educational expenses. This amounts to nearly 36% of the Ryerson student population. Since students on OSAP receive the remaining 40% of their loan around January 5th, and much of that is redirected to the university for tuition, we believe students financial concerns are heightened in January, explaining the dramatic increase in Good Food Centre visits. At the end of the winter semester in March we see the highest increase in number of visits. At this time, students are experiencing the greatest financial strain due to a depletion of loans and savings.

### *Why Are Students Going Hungry?*

**High cost of school  
tuition**

**Competitive job  
market**

**Inadequate student  
loans**

Student food insecurity has been an issue at Ryerson for over 20 years. While the Good Food Centre, originally named Student Feedback, reported low service usage shortly after its inception in the 1992/1993 academic year, the demand has now increased to levels so high that the service often struggles to meet the unique and varied needs of every member. Not surprisingly, as the cost of tuition and living has risen, so too has the demand for the Good Food Centre's food bank program.

In our experience providing emergency food relief to students at Ryerson, we believe the following are the top three major issues for students facing food insecurity: the high cost of tuition, inadequate student loans, and an overly competitive summer job market.

While the high cost of tuition is a major contributor to student food insecurity, we focus on OSAP and the summer job market in this report. Both the Canadian Federation of Students and the Ontario Federation of Students have produced extensive resources in regards to high tuition fees that can be found on their websites.

## Student Loans: Are They Enough?

In this next section, we analyze the Ontario Student Assistance Program and illustrate how even the maximum living allowances do not cover all the expenses associated with living in Toronto.

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Monthly Expense	OSAP Allowance <sup>5</sup>	Actual Cost
Rent	\$552	\$724 <sup>6*</sup>
Food	\$248	\$261 (men) <sup>7**</sup> \$202 (women) <sup>7**</sup>
Transportation	\$78	\$108 for Post Secondary TTC
Misc. Expense	\$267	\$267 <sup>***</sup>
Total	\$1145	\$1360 (men) and \$1300 women

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### Shortfall

**-\$215 for men and -\$155 for women**

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\*Based on the average cost of rent for a 2 bedroom apartment in Toronto divided by two

\*\*Based on the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto for men and women aged 19 – 30.

\*\*\*This amount varies greatly from person-to-person. However, we used OSAP's amount for simplicity purposes.

On an academic yearly basis, the current student loan amounts to a shortfall of \$1232 for women and \$1712 for men, respectively. However, even these calculations do not paint a fully accurate picture of the economic struggles faced by students. The calculations behind the Nutritious Food Basket have several shortcomings, including:

- Not accounting for foods that are purchased for religious or cultural reasons (e.g., kosher, halal). Special diets that address specific disease conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, celiac, etc. are not included.
- It is assumed that individuals always buy according to the lowest price and not necessarily according to need, preference or availability.
- It is assumed that the individual has the time, ability and food skills to prepare meals from scratch. Food dollars spent away from home are not factored into the cost of the basket.

The above pose some major limitations for post-secondary students. Many students follow kosher, halal, vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free diets. The closest grocery stores to Ryerson University are Metro and Loblaws - two premium grocery brands with high price points. Often times due to overloaded schedules, students do not have the time to cook at home, and thus, they purchase take-out and ready-made foods. As a result, students may be spending much more monthly on food than the Nutritious Food Basket suggests.

## Summer Employment

When a student's OSAP aid is calculated there is a presumed assumption that the student worked full-time throughout the summer. This is referred to as a pre-study income contribution. As the job economy has rebounded from the 2008 financial crisis, summer unemployment for post-secondary students has remained at rather high levels. A Statistics Canada report in the summer of 2012 pegged student summer unemployment at 13% or 111,600 students across Ontario. What does this mean for students? A student having no summer job, and thus less or no savings going into the next academic year, often means that they must rely on larger student loans and/or work throughout the academic year. As the Canadian Federation of Students notes, "Roughly 60 percent of university students who worked during the year reported that it had a negative impact on their academic performance. One in four of these students rated the impact as significant".<sup>8</sup>

**"This past summer a member told me they walked an hour and a half to get to the food centre because they couldn't afford transit"-  
GFC Coordinator**

Interestingly, a larger student loan to stay in school does not mean that there will be a financial payoff after graduation. As Daily Bread Food Bank reported, 34% of food bank users in the GTA have a college diploma, bachelors degree, masters degree or higher.<sup>9</sup>

## Is the Campus Food Centre the Solution?

Despite the record number of people accessing food banks across Ontario and Canada, food insecurity continues to be a major issue. Many food banks only provide a three-day supply of food once a month to their members, leaving their members to source food through other means for the rest of the month. While the Good Food Centre's model is more progressive in that we provide people with a three-day supply of food every week, our members may be going hungry for the four other days out of the week.

The problem with food procured at a food bank is that the food is often of varying quality, variety, and acceptability depending on a member's needs. A food bank is a short-term solution to a systemic, large-scale, and oppressive problem. Until tuition fees are frozen and reduced, government student loan programs are revised, and more adequate supports are put into place for economically marginalized students, a campus food centre will be the best line of defense against food insecurity at Ryerson.

**"There is absolutely no evidence that those who use food banks are less hungry than food insecure people who do not."- Valarie Tarasuk,  
Canadian Food Insecurity  
Researcher**

On the next page is a detailed list of recommendations for ending food insecurity at Ryerson. We urge you to share these with your friends and colleagues on campus and engage in discussions concerning how to end food insecurity at Ryerson.

# Recommendations for Reducing Food Insecurity at Ryerson

## Government Recommendations

### 1. Calculate financial aid with consideration to the poverty line

In 2009, the poverty line for a single individual was set at an after tax income of \$18 421.<sup>11</sup> This is equal to a monthly income of \$1,535. Although the maximum allotments of the Canada-Ontario Integrated Student Loan and the Canada Student Grant for Persons from Low-Income Families do place a student at this level, many students are not eligible for the maximum amounts due to previous income earned during the summer and the assumed financial contributions from their parents. However, as many students use their summer income to cover basic expenses such as rent and many parents cannot or are unwilling to financially support their children while in school, the use of these variables are both inaccurate and problematic.

In addition to this, the maximum allotments take into account tuition, meaning that many students are left to live off of \$6,000 or less for eight months once tuition has been deducted from their financial aid amount. Although OSAP is calculated with the cost of tuition and living expenses in mind, the amount allocated to students for both tuition and living expenses often leave them well below the poverty line.

We call upon both the federal and provincial government to review how financial aid is calculated to ensure that all students attending post-secondary school are above the poverty line before income

“Every week we get a donation of food and we have a line up down the hall... and we literally have [students] who can’t afford food...”-  
Student Activist during Freeze the Fees



### 2. Extend the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant to all students

This grant provides a rebate of \$1780 only to students who have been out of high school for 4 years or less. Mature students who have been out of high school for more than 4 years are not eligible for this grant. However, these students often have much higher expenses as they may be supporting dependents or independently supporting themselves.

We call upon the Ontario government to review the eligibility criteria of this grant to make it available to all Ontario students.

### **3. Calculate student loan cost of living by city rather than province**

The average monthly cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Toronto is \$1,448 per month, meaning that the average price to split a two bedroom apartment with a roommate is \$724/month per roommate. This figure, however, represents a citywide average and not housing in the downtown core near Ryerson where the price of rent is often much higher. Currently, the OSAP rent allowance is set at \$552 per month, which results in a monthly shortfall of \$172. This situates many students well below the poverty line when combined with education, food, utility, and transportation costs.

We call upon the Ontario government to re-evaluate these OSAP allowances, raising them in consideration of the high rental prices that students pay in order to be near campus.

### **4. Increase funding for Canada Summer Job opportunities**

Before the 1980s, summer jobs were plentiful and a majority of students could save enough throughout the summer to cover their full post-secondary costs for the coming year. Summer employment is so integral that even OSAP expects students to work throughout the summer to save. However, with the student summer unemployment rate <sup>10</sup>at 15.4% in 2012, students are having a hard enough time meeting their basic needs throughout the summer months, let alone saving for the coming academic year. While the Ontario government currently offers Canada Summer Jobs opportunities for students aged 15 - 30, the application process can be extremely competitive and the number of applicants can often be in the hundreds.

We call upon the Ontario government to combat precarious youth employment and prioritize job creation by increasing the amount of subsidies provided to encourage summer youth employment.





# *University Recommendations*

## **1. Freeze & Reduce Tuition Fees**

In line with the recommendations put forth by the Ryerson Students' Union's Freeze the Fees Campaign, we suggest that the university:

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**Progressively reduce International Student tuition fees to be in line with domestic students**

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**Meaningfully increase student representation on the Board of Governors (including part-time and distant education students)**

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**Place an immediate freeze on tuition fees, and join students in calling on the provincial government to allocate more funding to post-secondary institutions budget cuts**

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**Commit to a more accountable budgeting process by working to better consult students in developing a budget that does not include a tuition fee increase or academic departmental**

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## **2. Establish committed yearly funding to the Good Food Centre**

Although a campus food bank is not the long-term solution to food insecurity at Ryerson, the Good Food Centre receives no official financial support from the university. Until food insecurity has been eradicated at Ryerson, a campus food bank is essential for financially struggling students.

The centre's main operating budget comes entirely from RSU union fees and fundraising. As a result, the operating budget is not robust enough to provide adequate levels of food to meet all the cultural, dietary, sustainability, and quality preferences of our members.

At times, the university has been generous with financial donations in the past. However, the lack of a yearly financial commitment means that the centre's operating budget is subject to sporadic fluctuations year over year.

### 3. Rework unpaid co-ops, placements, and internships

For some professions, a field co-op or placement is incredibly valuable. However, students in programs that have compulsory field learning components pay twice: the course fee paid to the university for the co-op and the time spent doing unpaid labour at the co-op. Volunteering one's time to gain skills and build connections in underfunded fields such as nursing and social work makes sense. What does not make sense, however, is paying to do unpaid labour. Programs at other schools, such as the Community Worker Program at George Brown, do not have course fees for their placements. We call upon the university to rework these co-ops/placements so that there are no course fees to gain field experience.

### 4. Allocate more campus space for community gardens

Across the campus space constrictions are a challenging issue for students and administration. However, we believe that if there were more commons dedicated to community gardening that students would be able to increase their practical skills through urban agriculture, provide themselves with healthy and sustainable foods, and contribute to building a stronger sense of campus community.



## Letter of Solidarity for the Freeze the Fees Campaign

Food insecurity is a major issue at Ryerson University. Last year the Good Food Centre saw record numbers in member registrations and food bank usage. Demand is so high for the service that we cannot keep our shelves full for more than two days out of the week. While our dedicated staff works diligently to provide solutions to hunger on campus, our efforts are outpaced by the need for the service. We simply cannot provide the level and quality of food we know every hungry student deserves.

We believe at the Good Food Centre that the single greatest barrier to student food security is the high cost of tuition. Government assistance programs like OSAP, limited scholarships and bursaries, and part-time employment are simply not adequate for meeting the financial needs of many students. In our soon to be released report on food insecurity at Ryerson, we illustrate how even the maximum allotment of OSAP funding cannot cover all the expenses associated with living and going to university in Toronto. Simply put, tuition is starving our students.

Many of the students we see on a weekly basis are exhausted. Weighed down by the intersecting stress of their course loads, personal obligations, and financial worries, many students come to us as their last resort. There is nothing glamorous about using a food bank. While we do everything within our means to make the Good Food Centre the most welcoming and anti-oppressive space possible, using our service can still be embarrassing due to the societal stigma of using a food bank. There are without a doubt countless students who have not accessed our service and are going hungry for this very reason. It is shameful and embarrassing that students at Ryerson are managing these struggles.

The students who access our service are inspiring examples of resiliency. Against all odds they continually fight for their right to education and promising futures. However, as the saying goes in the food bank sector, our primary job is to work ourselves out of a job. We fear that as tuition fees increase, along with other essential expenses, that the demand for our service will continue to increase and the need for our jobs will only be reinforced.

We call upon our university, provincial governments and federal governments to consider the hidden struggles of hungry students. Furthermore, we call upon the university to honour education as a fundamental human right. By putting a stop to the 10th year of tuition fee increases, perhaps we will be one step closer to putting the campus food bank out of service. Until that time, we will continue to fight for equity, food security, and affordable (and eventually free) education.

In solidarity,

The Good Food Centre



## Future Considerations

This report only sheds a small fraction of light on the lives and identities of those accessing the Good Food Centre. Crucial demographic information, such as ethnicity and sexual orientation, were not reported on as the service's current intake forms do not request such information. A more comprehensive and voluntary survey will be administered to members in the future to better illustrate the intersectionalities of food insecurity at Ryerson.

A more widespread survey also needs to be conducted in order to greater understand food insecurity at Ryerson outside of the context of those utilizing the Good Food Centre's services. Tracking such information is crucial to fully understanding the impacts of high tuition fees and a difficult economic climate on food insecurity for post-secondary students.

## Upcoming Projects

The Good Food Centre is launching a variety of new programs and expanding existing ones in order to better combat food insecurity at Ryerson. Projects include establishing an indoor aquaponics gardening system, expanding the RSU community gardens to the rooftop of the Student Campus Centre, and launching a mental health horticultural peer support program. Interested individuals should contact [andrew.silverthorn@ryerson.ca](mailto:andrew.silverthorn@ryerson.ca) for more information.

## Conclusion

This report provides valuable insight into those utilizing the Good Food Centre. We hope this report provides a foundation for other post-secondary food relief programs and services in Canada to track and share demographic information about their service users to contribute to the national dialogue of post-secondary food insecurity.

Please direct all media inquiries to Rajean Hoilett at [president@rsuonline.ca](mailto:president@rsuonline.ca) or to Corey Scott at [equity@rsuonline.ca](mailto:equity@rsuonline.ca).

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those involved in the process of producing The Hunger Report. We would like to specifically mention Anthony Nguyen, Danielle Labonté, Alison Townsley, Nicola Nemy, and Corey Scott for their insightful input and thoughtful advice. In addition, we thank our many volunteers who conduct intake interviews and compile our members' data. We would also like to thank Tara Grundmanis for lending her design skills to the report.



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