Food Access Barriers and Supports for Youth: Thunder Bay, Canada

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The issue of youth food insecurity is examined in this thesis, in the context of a diverse urban centre which has a growing youth population and a high Indigenous presence. Literature review has identified gaps in academic literature examining location-based efforts to target food insecurity among youth in Canada, especially gaps in studies that focus on the needs of youth based on their experiences, and simultaneously investigate efforts made by support organizations to meet those needs. Approaches to supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in their food security needs, including cultural food security, is examined in this research undertaken in Thunder Bay, ON. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with 23 youth participants and 14 staff participants who are involved with various food support organizations. Youth participants were asked to discuss their household food situations, food preferences, barriers they face, and the support they need to have sustainable eating habits. Staff participants were asked to discuss the food security barriers they have identified and addressed within the community, and which barriers they perceived to be beyond their scope to support. A phenomenological analysis technique was used to interpret participants' experiences. A combination of literature search, and comparison of input from both youth and staff participants, led to a picture of food security in Thunder Bay youth. Based on these findings, three layers of barriers were identified, and a set of recommendations were generated aimed at improving food security. These recommendations centred around greater education and awareness, improved design of secondary support programs, and greater inclusion of Indigenous culture. It is hoped that this thesis will fill a gap that exists in academic literature examining food security initiatives aimed at youth at the community level, with direct insight from youth and staff who are involved with food support.

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Land Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this thesis was written on the traditional territory of Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850, and this land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and the Métis. The city of Thunder Bay, which I currently call home, has been shaped by the contributions of generations of peoples who have been the stewards of this land for thousands of years. I am grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and learn alongside the Indigenous Peoples of this area, share the land and resources, and exchange cultural experiences through collective efforts and initiatives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The most commonly cited definition of the term food security comes from the 1996 World Food Summit and is defined as follows: “food security exists when 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 a healthy and active life” (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009, p. 5). Despite ranking as the 9th largest economy in the world in 2021, in 2017-2018 the Canadian Community Health Survey found 12.7% of Canadian households to have experienced food insecurity (Johnston, 2021; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). This percentage is not uniform, and it has been found that households with children, households with social assistance as the main source of income, single parent households, and single-mother households were statistically more likely to experience food insecurity (Howard & Edge, 2013). Thunder Bay, a city in Northwestern Ontario, is the biggest urban hub in the region and is home to approximately 110,000 people. In 2018, 10.2% of the households in Thunder Bay district identified as food insecure according to a report by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (2018), and in 2017-2018, 14.5% of the population of Thunder Bay experienced marginal, moderate to severe food insecurity, according to Tarasuk and Mitchell (2020). This is slightly higher than the national average of 12.7%, as well as the Ontario average of 13.3% (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). A lower-income level is often associated with food insecurity, and 19.8% of children in Thunder Bay live in low-income households (Thunder Bay District Health Unit, 2018). This has recently been exacerbated as a result of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting hundreds of families relying on school food programs for lunch and snacks.

This distribution of this data is even more skewed when it comes to certain demographics within the wider population. Data from 2012 has shown that in Canada, food insecurity was prevalent in 28% of urban Indigenous households compared to 13% non-Indigenous households (Skinner, Pratley, & Burnett, 2016). This is relevant in Thunder Bay, because this city has the largest proportion of urban Indigenous population in Canada, which was almost 13% of the demographic in 2016 (Levkoe, Ray, & Mclaughlin, 2019). In 2015, 46% of the Indigenous population in the city consisted of youth under 25 years of age (Thunder Bay Strategic Plan, 2018).

The large population of Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay can be attributed to a few different factors. Thunder Bay is one of the biggest urban centres in Northwestern Ontario which provides many essential services such as hospitals, mental health counselling, jobs, as well as things like shopping, fast food, and entertainment, which are not available in remote northern communities (Levkoe et al., 2019; TVO Current Affairs, 2017). Many northern communities also do not have a high school, and teenagers usually need to drive or fly to Thunder Bay to pursue education beyond grade 8 (Finlay & Akbar, 2016; The Doc Project, 2016). Many students choose to attend Dennis Franklin Cromarty (DFC) High School, a school specifically for First Nations youth established in 2000 by the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council which serves youth from 20 communities in Northwestern Ontario, or the Matawa Education and Care

Centre, which serves nine communities (Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, 2022; Matawa First Nations, 2022). Although details about the schools could not be found in academic papers, news articles reported 148 students enrolled in DFC and 140 enrolled in Matawa in 2019 (Diaczuk, 2019; Isai, 2019). It can be assumed that the COVID-19 pandemic may have lowered student enrolment. Data on the proportion of Indigenous students currently enrolled at Lakehead Public School Board high schools could not be found. The board is currently conducting a voluntary student census (Winter 2022); however, this data will be kept confidential.

While some of these teenagers live with family or relatives, a large portion of the youth live in boarding houses, hotels, and student residences (Oshki-Wenjack, 2021; York, 2019). Living alone without a parent or guardian, students have to start making decisions about money, food, transport, laundry and various other essentials, often for the first time in their lives. Issues of systematic racism in Thunder Bay, leading to youth experiencing discrimination and a lack of security, contribute to youth finding themselves vulnerable and unable to advocate for themselves (Rae, Merrifield & Barton, 2017). It is assumed that these barriers, among others, may lead to youth in the city facing challenges with supporting their needs around food security.

There is an abundance of research on food security issues affecting on and off reserve Indigenous populations; however, there is a gap in academic literature highlighting the voices of these people in terms of their experiences receiving food related services and assistance. More importantly, there has been no academic research investigating food security needs of the youth age group, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who live in an urban environment. Understanding the various layers of barriers that impact food security of these youth, especially coming from first-hand experiences of the youth themselves, will allow organizations to provide targeted support. Understanding the barriers that organizations face when providing such support will also allow governments and funding organizations to better allocate their resources. Through a series of interviews with youth and staff members involved with food support programs and services in Thunder Bay, this research attempts to bridge some gaps in communication, re-examine the approaches to needs assessment, and improve resource allocation in the hope to create greater food access, utilization and stability among youth.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the barriers to food access faced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay, with specific focus on those barriers that are currently not being addressed by food support organizations. Another objective of this paper was to interpret the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth when it comes to food support, and to hear from the youth themselves whether they were being supported according to their needs. Lastly, challenges organizations faced at the current level of support were examined and strategies to create a greater impact in the community were discussed. Youth participants were asked to share their experiences with food situations in their lives and with these programs in an attempt to understand the kinds of barriers they face. To understand the efforts made at an organizational level, staff at various food service organizations were also asked to

discuss their experiences supporting these youth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both sets of participants in order to get a thorough understanding of these issues.

Chapter 2 in this thesis presents a literature review discussing food security and food sovereignty in Canada with a particular focus on the youth demographic. This section also documents some of the efforts that have been made to address food insecurity. The geographic focus of this thesis is the city of Thunder Bay, and Chapter 3 summarizes the demographics of this city and issues around food security that are present here. Chapter 4 explains the process that was followed to conduct the field research, a large part of which was interviews with youth and staff participants. Chapters 5 and 6 take the data obtained and present results and interpretations. This is where the voices of the participants are presented, and their thoughts are analyzed. These sections attempt to create bridges between the needs of the youth and the services offered to them, and identify challenges faced by both sides in meeting these needs. Chapter 7 concludes this paper with a summary of observations and recommendations from the research study.

Chapter 2: Linking Food Security and Food Sovereignty to the Lives of Urban Youth in North America

2.1 Food Security and Food Sovereignty

2.1.1 The Context of Food Security in the Global North

This thesis uses United Nations Food and Agriculture (FAO) definition of Food Security developed at the 1996 World Food Summit: food security is when “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” (Rohr, Blakley, & Loring, 2021, p. 2). Before the current definition of food security came into focus, there have been many attempts to conceptualize the idea of food security. In 1974 the FAO definition stood as “ensuring that adequate food for survival and health is available to all at all times” which focused on the supply of food, and in 1983 a new definition emerged: “anyone who can afford at any time to buy the basic foods they need” which focused on household and individual access to food (Xie, Wen, Choi, & Zhang, 2021, p. 1). Although a few decades old, this definition includes some of the major points in the context of today’s world, such as ensuring people can access the appropriate food in their vicinity and have the purchasing power to obtain that food, with an emphasis on food that provides nourishment rather than just curbing hunger. Going one step further, it includes food not only sufficient to keep someone sustained, but food that meets the preference of the individual based on culture, habits, needs and taste. In today’s world where communities have developed in remote corners of the world, and globalization has allowed people to settle far away from their geographical origins, this definition captures the diversity of needs.

The concept of correlating food security with only the idea of hunger prevention is, however, quite justified as a starting point. Around one billion people worldwide - making up 16% of the global population - experience chronic hunger, likely contributing to inadequate distribution of resources (Mc Carthy et al., 2018). In the global north, food wastage is rampant with over 400lbs wasted per year by each American and over 380lbs wasted by each European; in Canada food waste costs are equivalent to 2% of the country’s GDP (Mc Carthy et al., 2018; Odeh, 2010). Despite these excesses of food, inequalities in food access are prominent within the borders of these wealthy nations. Food insecurity was experienced by one in seven Americans in 2016 (Mc Carthy et al., 2018). In Canada, the number was one in eight households in 2017-2018, which equates to 4.4 million people, including 1.2 million children (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020).

Food has a direct relation to the health and well-being of an individual. The impacts of food insecurity may present differently in individuals based on age, and can have varying long-term consequences. Some of the problems identified in children in the United States include birth defects, anemia, lower nutrient intakes, cognitive problems, aggression anxiety; associations have also been made with having asthma, behavioral problems, depression, suicide ideation, and worse oral health (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). For seniors, food insecurity can lead to lower nutrient intakes, depression, and

poorer quality of life (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). For adults, the impacts include lower nutrient intake, mental health problems and depression, diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). A number of these health problems may stem not only from insufficient quantities of food, but also from nutrient deficiencies resulting from a lack of balanced nutrition intakes. It is likely that people who experience health problems may not have the ability to work enough to earn sufficient income, or to put in enough effort to ensure their food needs are met, which only promotes this cycle of insufficiency.

Impacts of food insecurity could not only manifest through poor physical and mental health in youth, but being young and vulnerable, there could also be a high likelihood for this group to demonstrate risky behaviors to cope with this challenge. Tarasuk, Dachner, Poland, and Gaetz (2009) identified five most common methods of food acquisition for Canadian homeless youth, which is quoted as:

> (i) purchasing food with money obtained through activities like panhandling; (ii) obtaining food from other people (passersby or those with whom they had some relationship); (iii) obtaining food free of charge or at nominal cost from charitable meal programmes; (iv) stealing food; and (v) retrieving food that had been discarded by others. (p. 1438)

In addition, women experiencing food insecurity are more likely to participate in risky sexual behaviour (Hadley, Belachew, Lindstrom, & Tessema, 2009). Youth with semi-stable or stable, but low-income housing, may employ some of these techniques as well, and it is important to understand what other methods they employ in acquiring food based on their situations. Specifically, food acquisition pattern and behaviour among street-involved youth and youth in permanent or semi-permanent housing in Thunder Bay has not been examined in current academic literature.

Despite Canada being one of the wealthier countries in the world, it is clear that the lives of all its residents do not hold the same standards. Money can be argued as one of the most important factors that determine how well a family eats, and as an expense that often has less accountability than rent or bills, food is an expense that families might cut in order to make ends meet. In Canada, individuals from a higher socioeconomic class tend to have more balanced, nutritional diets than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Azagba & Sharaf, 2011). While income has a direct impact on the types of food consumed, the educational level of the individual also impacts their awareness, and therefore food habits (Azagba & Sharaf, 2011). It is not surprising that buying sufficient quantities of food to curb hunger may take a higher priority than meeting nutritional requirements, and families may choose to buy carbs and fatty foods as opposed to fresh fruits and vegetables. This practice, although a solution in the short-term, could lead to malnutrition and health problems that lead to long-term challenges.

This can be of particular significance for youth, who are in the stages of developing both mentally and physically. Researchers agree that a combination of factors including

nutrition, housing, safety, finances and personal support can work together to impact youths' mental health and behaviour (Toombs et al., 2020). Food insecurity can lead to poor academic and social performance at school, a higher likelihood of health problems, greater chances of developing mental and physical disorders, and reduced healthcare support (Baer, Scherer, Fleegler, & Hassan, 2015). Factors outside the control of youth, such as social and economic inequalities, can adversely impact skill-development, social relationships, behaviour and physical and mental health (Goodman, Snyder, Wilson & Whitford, 2019). Paradoxically, all of this could lead to limitations in personal and professional growth and a cycle of continued food insecurity and other barriers in their lifetime.

International organizations and food support agencies are more focused on the global south, such as assistance provided by the World Food Program (WFP) and the Red Cross Society in Kenya (Mahmoudi, Shirzad, & Verter, 2022). Support is provided in a variety of ways by similar organizations including direct commodity aid, financial support in the form of money, and vouchers which can be redeemed at retailers that the food aid agencies have contracts with (Sahinyazan, Rancourt, & Verter, 2019). In developed countries, food support relies on either government interventions such as welfare and food relief, or third-party efforts which involve donors, charitable food organizations and food banks (Mahmoudi et al., 2022; Pollard & Booth, 2019). These efforts have not resulted in long-term decreases in food insecurity. In 2012, 57% of Canadians relying on government aid were food insecure, and despite the continued efforts of the government to engage more of the population in the workforce, the low wage rates and high cost of living often prevent substantial progress (Pollard & Booth, 2019). Less attention has been paid to programs which try to address the underlying problem, including those that aim to involve youth in food production and food-related economic activities as a means of decreasing food insecurity.

In order to understand the underlying factors that impact food security and to provide stable, longer-term solutions, it is necessary to recognize the four pillars of food security as defined by FAO: access, availability, utilization, and stability of supply (McCarthy et al., 2018; Power, 2008). A Health Canada report has elaborated on this, describing access as geographic access to vendors within one's ability to travel, availability as the variety of preferred food available within one's community, and utilization as the ability to acquire and use these foods determined by prices of these foods, and their quality in terms of freshness and nutrition (Skinner et al, 2016). While the first three pillars focus on how the country supplies the necessary food and how the citizens acquire and consume them, the fourth pillar also focuses on the continued stability of these three factors (Xie et al., 2021).

2.1.2 Food Security Concerns for Urban Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Youth

When it comes to research into food security needs, youth who are transitioning from care into a more independent life are largely overlooked. This is a demographic who may often struggle with self-identity due to their role as emerging adults in society, despite not having attained social and emotional maturity. The demographic of people

between 18 and 30 years old will be the focus of this thesis, which will further focus on the diversity in ethnicity, background, and socio-economic conditions that is often seen in the urban context. Specifically, the food needs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who have adapted to a life in a dynamic urban environment, as it relates to their preferences, skills, cultures, and backgrounds, may point to ways these youth can be supported.

The age range within which an individual is defined as a 'youth' varies among organizations working with this group. Youth typically refers to young people who are at the age of transitioning from reliance on caregivers to self-reliance as adults, and is defined within the age range of 15-24 by the United Nations as well as Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022; UNDESA, 2014). However, in some contexts this range can be a bit wider, such as Indigenous youth being defined as being between 15 and 29 years of age, to include the average ages of youth leaving school and entering the workforce (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2015). Further still, for the purposes of funding, many organizations identify their own specific age ranges. For example, the Youth Employment and Skills Program grant provided by the Government of Canada requires youth to be between 15 and 30 years of age at the start of the project (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2022).

At this age of transition, young people are expected to obtain the educational and professional training that define their career path going forward, as well as determine their financial status and lifestyles (Arnett, 2000). For many, this period is a time to explore their options, gather skills and knowledge, and build a network of support (Berzin, 2010). However, some youth face barriers to these developmental activities which prevent them from reaching their potential as thriving members of society.

Food security, especially in the context of making decisions and choices around the food consumed on a regular basis, can be a challenge for many youth. Researchers studied the direct connection of youth to activities that allow greater decision-making in their food habits, and identified two categories of food security barriers, namely production and income generation (Feighery, Ingram, Li, & Redding, 2015). When it comes to food production, the involvement of youth is hindered by lack of agricultural land, availability of modern technology and equipment, lack of interest and education in food production, and a lack of nutritious food intake leading to unfamiliarity with food diversity (Feighery et al., 2015). While this may be more applicable to youth who have grown up in farming communities or in the global south, this could also apply to Indigenous youth in Canada who have spent time hunting, fishing, and foraging in their reserve communities, and then lost access and potentially interest after adapting to urban life. In the context of an urban centre like Thunder Bay, the involvement of youth with food production activities can be assumed to be minimal other than through school and community gardening.

A more relevant context would be the importance of income as a barrier to food security, which may be more in line with the barriers faced by Thunder Bay youth. Lack of education, training, and access to the job market leads to difficulty securing

employment, and even when they do, youth often do not earn enough money to maintain household food security; in fact, youth around the world have a two to three times higher likelihood of unemployment compared to adults (Feighery et al., 2015). This affects youth to a lesser extent if they live with middle-class parents, but particularly acute for youth who live on their own, far from support networks. Income is not the only factor that impacts an individual's eating habits, as will be discussed in detail as part of this thesis. Other factors, including housing and access to healthcare, can also have a combined impact on how youth transition into adulthood (Baer et al., 2015), and it can be argued that oftentimes many of these barriers appear together in the lives of youth. In the face of such barriers, youth rarely have the freedom to think about their food preferences and choices, and in many cases need to rely on whatever is available in order to survive.

Income and financial stability impact some demographics differently than others. In Ontario 24% of the Indigenous population lives below the poverty line as opposed to 14% of the non-Indigenous population (Krysowaty, 2017). Strikingly, one out of every two children identified as Status First Nations lives in poverty in Canada (Krysowaty, 2017). Poverty has also been linked to youth suicide, and 2006 data from Health Canada shows that Indigenous youth have five to seven times higher suicide rates than non-Indigenous youth (Baskin, 2008). A 2018 Point in Time Survey of Thunder Bay had identified 516 homeless individuals in the city on a given day (DSSAB and LSPC, 2018). Of this, 66.5% of the people identified as Indigenous; 41% of the people were between the ages of 16 and 34, and 80% of the people who identified as youth also identified as Indigenous (DSSAB and LSPC, 2018). Tarasuk et al. (2009) discussed the dangerous behaviour adapted by street-involved youth when faced with food insecurity. Challenges with food, income, unemployment and so on, could lead to youth making desperate choices. Thunder Bay is a city where Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the social and criminal justice systems (LaPrairie, 2002 cited in Wiley, Love & Emmett, 2020). Youth who are incarcerated, or who live in foster care, may find it challenging to voice their barriers and challenges around food security, especially in an environment where they feel unfamiliar and vulnerable. It could also have an added challenge for Indigenous youth in terms of staying connected with their family's cultures and traditions.

Food insecurity has an additional dimension when it comes to the urban Indigenous population, because of the diversity in terms of cultural ties, lived experiences, and relationship with food (Skinner et al., 2016). In urban contexts, foods that speak to an individual's cultural identity may not be as readily available, particularly among food supply organizations. In addition, a reduced access to land-based activities and housing instability in cities impact the consistency of familial and social bonds, leading to a reduced connection to cultural identity (McEachern, 2021). When a person is struggling with basic necessities such as food and housing, physical survival often takes precedence over meeting cultural needs.

The needs of Indigenous people are often overlooked when it comes to developing strategies to battle food insecurity. Bhawra, Cooke, Guo and Wilk (2017) point out that

under prominent definitions of food security, the cultural aspects of food and access to traditional foods for Indigenous food security are not emphasized. "Cultural Food Security" has been proposed as an additional dimension of food security as it pertains to the needs of Indigenous people, and insecurity in this regard stems from various barriers to obtaining and eating traditional foods (Power, 2008). These include visible barriers to certain foods and cultural activities brought about due to climate change impacting ecosystems, transport barriers to accessing hunting/foraging activities, or insufficient manpower to arrange and undertake these initiatives, among others. Barriers also include issues of lack of interest from younger generations, paid employment not allowing for time to pursue traditional activities, and the increased reliance on market foods (Power, 2008). It seems that with greater integration into an urban life, the mindsets of Indigenous youth may also be adapting to a more western worldview with a greater reliance on established food provisioning systems and structures.

Healthcare providers, nutritionists and federal guidelines including Canada's Food Guide are rooted in a Eurocentric concept of health and body image, which excludes the perspectives and needs of Indigenous youth with respect to what is known as balanced physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Alani-Verjee, Braunberger, Bobinski, & Mushquash, 2017). This balance has been described as 'holistic', and Elders have described how moving into the western and commercialized models of beauty and food consumption often conflicts with traditional understandings of these concepts, creating disruptions (Alani-Verjee et al., 2017). Lack of proper education and cultural exposure for youth may promote Eurocentric ways of thinking and lead to a passive loss of connection with their roots. The Elders described the disconnect between the older and younger generations, and how some of the traditional teachings do not resonate with the new generations (Alani-Verjee et al., 2017). It is therefore important to understand the ways connection to culture and tradition may help Indigenous youth in unique ways, and to consider methods to incorporate the cultural aspect of food security when it comes to supporting Indigenous youth in cities.

Youth who move to cities after spending time in their reserve communities often find themselves in an unexpectedly new culture, where they have to alter much of their food habits to adjust to the resources available to them. Brown, Isaak, Lengyel, Hanning and Friel (2008) observed changes in food patterns and satisfaction levels among Indigenous men and women who had migrated to urban areas from their reserve communities. Themes that emerged include reduced access to traditional and fresh meats in their diet, reduced participation in food gathering, cooking, and sharing, and increased dependency on unhealthy fast-food (Brown et al., 2008). Moving to a new city may bring with it challenges around navigation, job search, or schoolwork, preventing youth from finding the time to seek out these activities. It is to be noted that while participants agreed that store bought food is more convenient, quicker to obtain, and allows greater access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy, their constraints around time and access to a fully equipped kitchen prevented participants from cooking using traditional ingredients and methods of preparation (Brown et al., 2008). Cidro, Adekunle, Peters and Martens (2015) added to this by saying that urban Indigenous food

insecurity can be attributed to low consumption of fruits and vegetables brought about by a variety of reasons including cost, availability, and negative perceptions with commercial grocery stores. This demonstrates a connection to the three of the four pillars of food security, that availability alone cannot provide food security if access and utilization cannot be achieved with the resources available to people. This is also an example of how a combination of various factors impact eating habits, and access to one resource without another may still provide a significant barrier to food security.

Youth growing up in these urban households may not have access to or examples of traditional knowledge and values, and eventually may adapt a more western diet provided they have availability and access to sufficient food. This was observed by Elliott, Jayatilaka, Brown, Varley, and Corbett (2012) who examined barriers youth face when accessing traditional foods in cities; some findings included disconnect from communities and cultural immersion, needing to adapt to self-first lifestyle to survive in the city, finding a balance between old and new ways, and lacking tools and guidance (such as access to Elders) to connect to traditions. Food security studies regarding Indigenous peoples therefore need to consider relationships with both traditional and market foods within urban spaces (Elliott et al., 2012). Moreover, going one step beyond the physical access to traditional practices, education and awareness for Indigenous youth growing up separated from their culture should also be incorporated into the objective of cultural food security. Figures 1a and 1b are reprinted from Elliott et al. (2012) to present their findings around barriers and access to cultural foods for Indigenous people in an urban context.

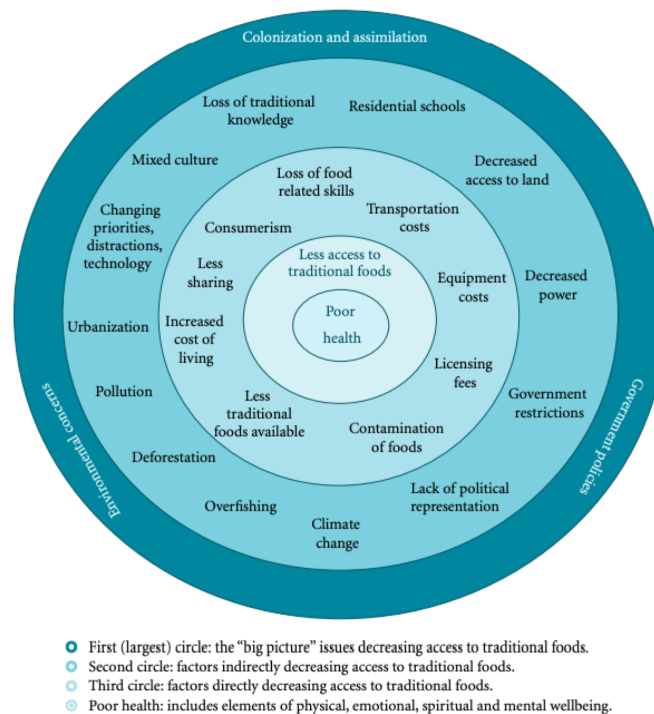
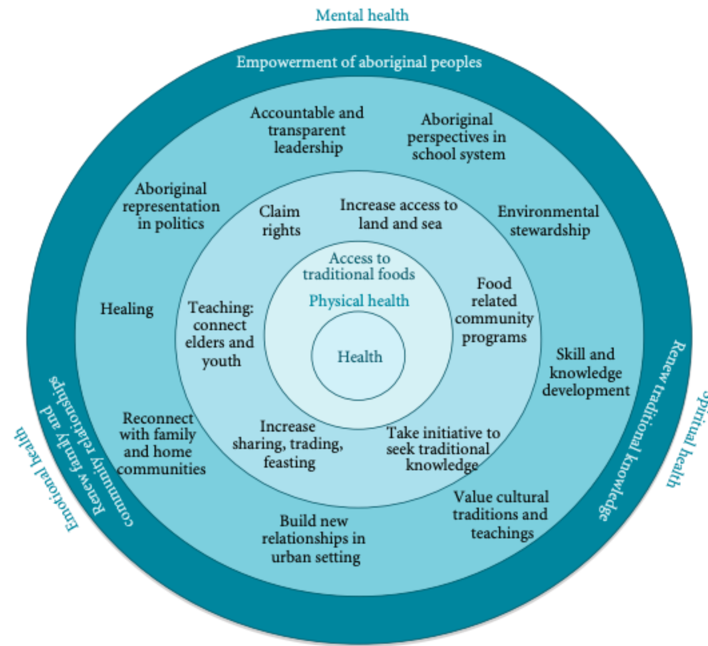


Figure 1a: Factors that limit access to traditional foods in the city (Reprinted from Elliott et al., 2012)



- First (largest) circle: the "high level" solutions to increasing access to traditional foods.
- Second circle: factors indirectly affecting access to traditional foods.
- Third circle: factors directly affecting access to traditional foods.
- Health includes:
  (i) physical health (healthy eating of traditional foods),
  (ii) emotional health (social support through relationships),
  (iii) spiritual health (increased cultural connectivity),
  (iv) mental health (increased sense of cultural identity, pride and vision).

Figure 1b: Actions to increase access to traditional foods in the city (Reprinted from Elliott et al., 2012)

Food security is a multifaceted problem, and a number of factors need to be in place before an individual can become fully equipped to deal with this issue. In the case of youth, this presents a bigger challenge because they have existing barriers around transitioning into an independent life, such as finding housing, employment, and transport. Some youth may not have the skills around managing their finances, budgeting, and shopping for food, or the skills to make themselves healthy meals. Indigenous youth living in the city under similar conditions also feel disconnected from their traditional values, and the food they hold in high regard may lose relevance. For these youth, recreating those meals in an urban context with little access to ingredients is an added challenge. For these various reasons, it might be important to identify specific barriers that impact food security among Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living in cities, and to identify appropriate supports that would help youth overcome them.

2.1.3 One Step Further: Food Sovereignty

A definition of food sovereignty was described by the humanitarian organization La Via Campesina in 1996 and encompasses the idea that individuals have the "right to define their own agricultural and food policies" and have the ability to grow the food they want,

how they deem appropriate, on the land that is theirs, and have control over marketing and distribution (Desmarais, 2003, p. 140). Since being coined in 1996, the concept has taken a permanent role on the world stage starting in 2007 at the Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Selingue, Mali (Hoover, 2017). Here, food sovereignty was defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Nyeleni 2007 as cited in Hoover, 2017, p. 2). The movement originally emerged as an opposition to the large-scale corporate takeover of land and food production, which pushed aside smallholder, sustainable farming practices and made farmers and consumers dependent on a few large, wealthy companies (McMichael, 2014). An overarching theme of food sovereignty therefore involves taking ownership of one’s own food source. In today’s context, Indigenous people living in urban spaces find it especially difficult to obtain food that is culturally appropriate. Not only is this food not available at mainstream food supply locations, but some youth may also not know how to prepare this food when they do obtain it. Food sovereignty in the modern context, therefore, includes all the components of food security such as greater availability, access, knowledge and education around utilization, stability of this food source, as well as the freedom of people to make choices around the sources of these foods.

While food sovereignty movements have been at the forefront of many community efforts, it may be said that modern day approaches have frequently focused on those with the resources to challenge dominant food systems and not inclusive of people in lower-income brackets (Block et al., 2012). The post-World War II industrialization of food has separated most people from primary food production. There is a misconception in the notion that if people learned more about the value of ethically and locally produced food, and knew where their food came from, they would be willing to pay more (Guthman, 2008). This ignores the reality where some people may simply have greater obligations around their income and may not care enough to allocate a larger share to sustainable food. Initiatives such as promoting local food, farmers' markets, and focusing on ecological sustainability often result in higher quality yet higher priced foods which are not affordable for low-income families (Block et al., 2012). In this light, although Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), allows people a certain level of connection with what is grown, how the plants are cared for, and promotes a relationship with the farmers, the bulk sum of money needed at the beginning of the farming season is a barrier for many (Guthman, 2008). This indicates that food sovereignty does not look the same with everyone, and strategies to promote empowerment and decision making within stakeholders’ budgets need to be explored.

Racial disparities also exist within these alternative food scenarios, and a study conducted by the USDA found that 74% of the customers at farmers' markets were white, while the remaining 26% was made up of African American, Asian and Hispanic demographics (Guthman, 2008). For people with different backgrounds and cultures, these markets stray from the traditional food system defined as “all of the food species that are available to a particular culture from local natural resources and the accepted patterns for their use within that culture” (Kuhnlein & Chan, 2000 as cited in Elliott et al.,

2012, p. 1). In addition to the 'whiteness' of alternative food markets that minority populations have to navigate (Guthman, 2008), it also becomes a challenge to achieve food sovereignty when the desired food is not available. Food items that complement the food habits of diverse populations can sometimes only be obtained from suppliers who import them. Drawing back to the definition of food security, sometimes eating preferred foods may be in direct conflict with local, sustainable production.

Although originally started as a movement for marginalized Latin American farmers, and later adapted for European and Western smallholder farmers, the concept of food is salient for Indigenous communities from various geographical localities with equal seriousness and with unique problems. One of the earliest losses took place when the prairie bison disappeared, taking with them the traditional meat harvesting process many Indigenous communities relied on (Martens, Cidro, Hart & McLachlan, 2016). This shifted food acquisition methods and gave way to reliance on treaties and Eurocentric means of food acquisition, leading to present day 'Northern Stores' supplying commercial goods to remote communities - a reliance reinforced by deterioration of land and water qualities and habitat loss due to construction and development in northern landscapes (Martens et al., 2016). Many Indigenous youth were forced to adapt to a western diet of domesticated meats, cheese, wheat flour and sugar, and were punished for wanting traditional foods that their bodies and palates were used to (Coté, 2016). This may have had long-term implications as these commercialized food habits have passed down through generations and formed the preferences of today's youth. These preferences, shaped by habit, also play a role in food sovereignty since eating what is familiar and comforting is a large part of ownership over one's diet.

In an article challenging the current concepts of food sovereignty, Whyte (2016) describes food sovereignty as:

> Food-production systems characterized by community food self-sufficiency or cultural autonomy in relation to food. These concepts refer to community-based control over the major dimensions of food production, distribution, and consumption, and the recycling or disposal of food refuse—from cultural customs to political institutions. (p. 2)

The author observed that not only does this definition put a burden on the community to collectively uphold these principles, but barriers could also arise from reliance on easy access to store-bought food, a taste for non-local foods, the inability to produce and trade high quality foods that would sustain the community, and building trust relationships between different community groups to support each other (Whyte, 2016). Coté (2016, pg.8) stated "problems arise when Indigenous people use non-Indigenous terms to define their movements, their theories, and their lives".

Traditional definitions of food sovereignty do not fully envelop the phenomenon as experienced by Indigenous peoples. When the pan-Canadian People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) initially launched in 2009, many Indigenous groups felt that food sovereignty ought to include discussions of decolonization, self-determination, and

traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, and gathering, going beyond the focus on farming and land ownership (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). In addition to ownership over food and food systems, Indigenous food sovereignty also emphasizes people's relationships with food, and the focus on community efforts to share food and exchange knowledge (Robin, 2019). This poses a unique challenge for Indigenous people living in urban areas, because of the diversity of attachment of individuals to traditional and modern ways of life.

The relationship Indigenous people have with their land, water and food is one of partnership, respect, and coexistence, as opposed to the modern relationship of commodification for anthropogenic use (Coté, 2016). Whyte (2016) further argued that Indigenous food sovereignty has an ecological component to it which is often overlooked in popular definitions, such as the intrinsic value of wild rice for Ojibwe people grown on traditional lands, or the practice of whaling that brings the community together that goes beyond the sustenance from the meat, or even the interactions and stories shared among people of different generations as they tie knots in fishing nets. Understanding these concepts and practices from the perspectives of people who have lived experience may allow for re-creation of these traditions in the urban context, aimed at youth who do not have the opportunity for full cultural immersion. Food sovereignty looks different for urban Indigenous people based on lived experiences, background, cultural influence, and family upbringing.

It is thought that even within the urban context, the four pillars of Indigenous food sovereignty can be upheld:

> 1) food is sacred and should be treated as such; 2) participation in land-based food activities is important and requires an action-based approach; 3) self-determination of food systems is critical; and 4) policy reform is a necessary component to addressing and achieving Indigenous food sovereignty goals (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, 2011 as cited in Martens et al., 2016, p. 21-22).

This was examined in Cidro et al. (2015), where interviews were conducted with Indigenous participants involved in food and education related work in Winnipeg, MB. This research found that the connection with traditional foods can be maintained by young Indigenous individuals living in the city through friends and family still practising traditional ways of life, and although traditional practices such as hunting and fishing were not as accessible by urban youth, growing food in the city for the purpose of eating and sharing can still foster that connection to land and food, which forms a pillar of food sovereignty (Cidro et al., 2015).

Although this paper primarily focuses on food security for urban youth, the concepts of food sovereignty inform food security goals that are dignified, empowering and allows youth to feel more in control of their eating habits.

2.2 Challenges Youth Face Around Food Security and Sovereignty

While it has been established that income and financial security have a direct impact on one's purchasing power and thereby food security, there are several other factors that may impact how and what people eat. Low-income households often face a multitude of issues related to poverty which hold them back from having safe, nutritious and preferred food habits. The quality of food, such as diversity and balanced meals, was one of the biggest needs identified by food insecure households in Quebec, along with reliable access to food support programs (Hamelin, Mercier, & Bédard, 2011). Food support, such as charitable meal programs, is a crucial food access point for many households in North America, supplying families with hot meals or pantry items to be cooked at home. While available to all, these services come with their own set of barriers related to accessibility which will be discussed in the following section. Of course, money and employment have been identified as important needs, especially around housing, since rent and mortgage are competing expenses with food, leading to low-income families consuming reduced quantities and qualities of food (Hamelin et al., 2011; Kirkpartick & Tarasuk, 2003). Another important aspect of food security is the capacity that people have to prepare and eat food that tastes and feels good based on their lifestyles, childhood food habits, and personal preferences, as well as the food skills, kitchen space, and equipment needed to accomplish this (Hamelin et al., 2011). Reliable housing hence plays another role in food security, as many people who do not have access to a kitchen and storage space may not be in a position to utilize grocery stores and food support programs.

On the other hand, food access for homeless individuals looks quite different. People with little or no secure housing are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity (Bowen & Irish, 2017). While this demographic may opt for food acquisition at soup kitchens or meal programs which appear to be the safest method of food access, the stigma and embarrassment around handouts could deter people from accessing such services (Bowen & Irish, 2017). Furthermore, they might even be hesitant to go to a food bank where most of the food is canned or pantry items that need to be prepared before consumption, as they may lack the means to open and/or prepare these items. This is a clear example of how lack of one secure asset in someone's life can lead to insecurity in other areas. Although the service does exist from the government's point of view, it may not be accessible to the target population for a variety of reasons.

Free meal programs may sometimes have an institutional feel to them and have a limited window for accessing services; added to this is the possibility that prepared food may run out before everyone is served (Bowen & Irish, 2017). Past experience of waiting in line and returning empty handed, or hearing stories of similar experiences from friends, may discourage many youth from travelling to these locations (Bowen & Irish, 2017). This is especially true when soup kitchens are far away, and the cost of bus fare is involved. Tarasuk et al. (2009) note that many food programs have organizational inadequacy, leading to lesser quality and insufficient quantity, as well as unreliable frequency of service. Given that many charitable food support programs are funded by donations and rely largely on volunteer staff, it comes as no surprise that

consistency in standards of service may be difficult to maintain. This brings attention to the fact that barriers to food security not only emerge from the challenges present in youths' lives, but can also stem from support organizations themselves. Attaining community food security will therefore need action to both support the needs of the youth, and to reduce the barriers presented to them by support organizations.

Another important barrier to food access is transportation, especially when it dictates people's physical access to and from food support locations, which are often only open for a limited number of hours. Families with reliable transport are more able to access diverse, cost effective and healthy foods compared to those limited to shopping at their nearest convenience stores (Thayer, Farquhar, Walkinshaw, Wool, & Jones-Smith, 2021). This could be a particular challenge for youth who do not live with family and cannot afford a personal vehicle or regular bus fare. In the context of Thunder Bay, it is a city that was formed after two smaller cities merged together causing services to be spread out and difficult to access by foot. The bus service to go across town only runs every 30 minutes according to the transit website, making it difficult for people to access multiple locations in the same day (City of Thunder Bay, 2021).

Other than direct accessibility, there are indirect psychological barriers youth face when it comes to accessing food, particularly from charitable organizations. Homeless youth may be more prone to food insecurity because of hesitancy around seeking shelters and food support, which challenge their sense of independence and dignity (Bowen & Irish, 2017). This may often result in people either engaging in risky behaviour to obtain food, or go hungry, both approaches allowing them to be more in control of their food situations as opposed to receiving support. Another barrier for young homeless individuals is concerns around ill treatment from government service workers, such as not being taken seriously or a perceived lack of respect and tact, which discourages youth from going to government offices to obtain assistance (Bowen & Irish, 2017). This may yet again present another paradox: support from social workers may be helpful in navigating barriers around many aspects of life, but trust in social workers may be lacking.

Even with services from community organizations in place to support youth with navigation around complicated government systems, reasons still exist for youth to not seek them out. Indigenous youth living in Winnipeg identified barriers to accessing social services including non-supportive relationships at home, housing instability, racism experienced in the community, unhealthy or harmful associations that youth build out of necessity, and a lack of supportive, safe spaces that allow youth to be open and vulnerable (Goodman et al., 2019). Another barrier that impacts the ability of youth to access services is their age, as youth often may not feel safe and comfortable in programs geared towards older adults which leads to lower success rates. Barker, Kerr, Nguyen, Wood, and DeBeck (2015) recommended implementing more gradual age transitions with similar aged cohorts in program groups. This barrier to access may be visible in overnight shelters where groups such as young adults or LGBTQ2S+ youth feel less comfortable sharing a room with a public crowd, which may lead to a choice of

spending nights outside, and potentially missing out on meals and services available to them at these shelters.
Similar to barriers to accessing shelter, housing, and related services, youth frequently encounter barriers to health care as well. While Baer et al. (2015) pointed out difficulties with health insurance American youth often have to face, youth in Canada receive universal healthcare. But this financial freedom alone is not always helpful. A lack of information and knowledge around navigating these systems can be a huge barrier for youth, often making them less inclined to walk into a location or to seek out support. Youth can often be self-conscious, and the hesitation around being looked at may lead to a lack of initiative. A study with street involved youth in Vancouver showed that more than 60% of the participants faced barriers with accessing health and social service care stemming from not having supportive adults in their lives, discrimination at these locations, fear of being registered into foster care or the criminal justice system because of the nature of support sought, lack of awareness of available services, lacking official identification documentation, transportation fares, and long wait times (Barker et al., 2015).

Food insecurity does not exist on its own, there is a complicated, self-reinforcing relationship between it and these other factors. This highlights the need for youth to have greater control over their own lives, which not only includes being taught skills to advocate for themselves, but also having the capacity to prevent difficulties from becoming exacerbated by equipping them with the support needed to plan, acquire, and eat the food they feel connected with. This includes secure housing, easy access to healthcare, support with social services, and being able to find these supports in a safe, comfortable, and dignified environment.

This section has identified many of the barriers youth face when it comes to achieving food security in their daily lives, both personal and organizational. However, one final comment has to be made about the approach itself through which data on these barriers is gathered. Oftentimes, accessing youth for research purposes is difficult, and researchers choose to connect with them through an organization or program youth are already a part of. An example of this is the research study in Winnipeg by Goodman et al. (2019), who spoke with youth involved with an Indigenous-run organization in the city. This could mean that youth with certain unknown barriers, which prevented them from attending this organization in the first place, were not taken into account. This presents a problem of survival bias, and in the process researchers and support organizations are missing out on information around barriers from certain groups, which may be different from barriers they have learned about from their sample population. For instance, the Vancouver study by Barker et al. (2015) surprisingly found that Indigenous youth reported less cases of barriers to accessing services; however, the authors concluded that while this finding appears to show a high rate of accessibility, in reality, this could mean that Indigenous youth were not reporting on their experiences because they were not accessing them, resulting from a lack of interest in these services brought about by a negative view of the government. Therefore, it can be said that there are barriers present in the lives of youth that support organizations may not be aware of. In addition to including youth who are already somewhat connected to the

support systems, it will be necessary to identify and gather insight from those youth who have little or no support.
While it can be said that some of the primary and visible barriers to food security may be addressed with umbrella approaches that include youth from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, more specific approaches may be needed in targeted cultural support, for them to truly achieve food security in all senses of the term. Especially when it comes to Indigenous youth, food is a large part of culture, and connection to these traditional meals forms a large part of food security. Some of the recommendations that came from research around supporting youth to be more in-tune with cultural learning include making food and health related information more accessible, encouraging cultural teachings, and finding methods of support that are well-received by youth (Alani-Verjee et al., 2017). This will likely encourage youth to not only learn about cultural foods, but also motivate them to take a more inquisitive look at their daily food intake. The environment surrounding a young individual shapes their behaviour, and having positive support in their lives shapes more than just their eating habits. Researchers found positive influences to include adults at school or family members who promote healthy eating, and cultural practices of cooking and sharing traditional foods (Kerpan, Humbert, & Henry, 2015). Elders also made an emphasis on empowering youth to have control over the decisions around their food, and to be connected to Indigenous role models who are relatable and connect with the youth at their level (Alani-Verjee et al., 2017). It is said that having one supportive adult in a youth’s life may be what makes a difference in the course their life takes, and support such as this coming from school, support workers, or friends and family is very important in shaping them in their age of transition into adulthood.

2.3 Interventions to Address Food Insecurity/Enhance Food Sovereignty

There has been extensive work done in both the US and Canada when it comes to creating greater public connection and support with foods people consume, especially at the community level. Fairholm (1999) identified existing and effective approaches to alternative food production in Canada, such as urban and rooftop gardening, alternative food distribution such as community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, food co-ops and community kitchens, emergency food distribution such as food banks and soup kitchens, and food education and skills development where various community focused organizations design and deliver programs to target communities. Kantor (2001) identified similar approaches to community level food security in the US including food stamps, farmers' markets, community gardens, cooperatives, community supported agriculture, farm to school Initiatives and food recovery programs. Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) discovered that local initiatives to alleviate household food insecurity included food banks and meal programs, alongside food skills programs such as community kitchens and gardens.

While these findings are a few decades old, very similar programs still dominate the food security and food sovereignty initiatives. These can be important tools to not only provide emergency short-term relief, but also provide skills for participants to improve their food situations in the long-term. Examples of social support to help urban

Indigenous people thrive in cities have been recorded in Cidro et al. (2015) in Winnipeg. This includes food banks and soup kitchens, and more stable programs such as nutrition education and community gardens. A meal program called the Good Food Box has been developed by the Winnipeg Foodshare Co-op which supplies food at cost to the public (Cidro et al., 2015). Other programs in Winnipeg include culturally appropriate educational programs for alternative education platforms (Cidro et al., 2015).

Considering that a diversity of these programs with similar goals are often present within a community, location-based studies are a great way to identify targeted efforts by a variety of organizations, and their reception among the youth demographic. Studies that investigate specific cities or communities often have the capacity to create a comprehensive picture of the services available to its members. It allows an understanding of how organizations work at the ground level to provide support, and which types are most well received by the public. Clendenning, Dressler, and Richards (2016) conducted a study in two cities in the US: Oakland, CA and New Orleans, LA, and identified several alternative food movements to promote food sovereignty among their residents. In Oakland, the researchers found a number of community focused organizations working with food justice and education geared towards youth and low-income families to bring about conversations around food sovereignty. These organizations work on growing and distributing their own food within the community, and fostering hands-on engagement and community building through the process (Clendenning et al., 2016). Similar movements were found in New Orleans as well, with a theme of supporting local food and the local economy as a major part of food sovereignty (Clendenning et al., 2016). A Canadian example comes from Black Creek Community Farm. The farm, which is located on six acres in the middle of a low-income neighbourhood in North York, Toronto, hopes to create awareness and engagement among local residents and promote sustainable food production and distribution among community members (Trompette, 2014). These projects have common goals focused on fostering greater availability of the food for locals, space for the local youth to be involved in the food production, and a sense of stewardship over the land and the resources. An important way to give the power back to youth and allow them to make their own decisions about their food habits is to provide a platform for them to be more involved, and these organizations therefore not only create physical access to food but also an emotional connection to it.

Various organizations focus on different aspects of food security through their programs and services. McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo and Costello (2005) discussed three stages to bring about community food security and sustainability. This includes the short-term goals of persuading community members to rely less on grocery stores and more on community efforts to produce and distribute foods, medium term goals of connecting local efforts with wide range initiatives to reach more people, and long-term goals of establishing these changes at the policy level through advocacy movements (McCullum et al., 2005). Community garden spaces in collaboration with education on basic gardening techniques could promote this interest in growing one’s own food, especially in a group environment that allows people to get out and share space and knowledge with others. This has already been happening in school garden programs

with youth and in the aforementioned urban community farms. However, it is worth looking into the lifestyles of the people these programs are serving, in order to see if this kind of involvement fits with their urban lifestyles.

When it comes to creating a greater connection between residents and community efforts, several organizations have been discussed who facilitate this process. One such organization is the Greater Lansing Food Bank in Michigan, which started an incubator farm in 2012 which allows barrier-free start-ups for small farms including land, training, tools and marketing opportunities (Ballantyne, Baylor, Bowe, & Stewart, 2015). This allows people to grow and harvest their own food rather than relying on availability at food banks (Ballantyne et al., 2015). This may contribute to meeting the second pillar of food security: access. The barriers that many youth face, including the stigma and technicalities around attending food banks, difficulty navigating social systems, and transportation to carry back their food, may be avoided by this alternative method of food acquisition. Growing your own food is indeed more work, but it also encourages greater involvement and therefore the value of the food itself is greater. Both the short-term and medium-term stages are discussed in this thesis; they both focus on the community and organizations providing programs and services often touch on both. The long-term policy level changes that promote food security are not discussed in detail; however, it is hoped that this thesis itself will become a tool that can provide governments, non-profits, and advocacy groups with information and recommendations to contribute to those changes.

Another interesting aspect of focusing on a city or a community to understand their food support dynamics is the opportunity to observe how various organizations interact with each other. A US study conducted between 2011 and 2013 examined food banks that collaborated with programs focused on gardening, farming, and gleaning (meaning obtaining food from residual farm production or farmers' market surplus), and in turn the roles of these programs in capacity building around food skills for those who were involved (Vitiello, Grisso, Whiteside, & Fischman, 2015). Gardening programs often relied on affluent or well-off volunteers who would donate their time as part of charity (Vitiello et al., 2015), something that might not fit into the lives of low-income families striving to generate income. However, while farms are sometimes able to involve low-income beneficiaries as part of the growing and harvesting team, a larger proportion of low-income individuals participate in gleaning (Vitiello et al., 2015). Despite the divide in demographics who were engaged in the different stages of this process, gardening programs have allowed the ownership of food to go back to those who needed this the most. It was observed that farming and culinary training programs are the most effective in engaging people in hands-on food skills (Vitiello et al., 2015). This may lead to the understanding that creating a space where learning and doing is guided or facilitated, as opposed to providing a platform for completely independent learning, might create greater engagement and interest in participants. Further research on how these collaborations between organizations supporting a range of needs could work together to provide wrap-around support for youth could be an important avenue to explore for food security at the community level.

Food support programs in Canada largely focus on charitable food donations and appear mostly in the form of food banks and soup kitchens (Lardeau, Healey, & Ford, 2011). This practice has also been popular in the northern areas of the country, including some remote communities (Lardeau et al., 2011). Services such as these allow people to obtain prepared food and pantry items free of charge at specific dates and times, at regular intervals. Many establishments that had started as emergency food support now have regular patrons who have come to rely on these centres for food. Instead of alleviating food insecurity and eventually ceasing to exist, food banks have now become permanent structures (Levkoe, 2003). Despite this, such primary support services cannot be considered to be the solution to food insecurity. These services attempt to solve the food security problem by circumstantial and short-term solutions, while the real issue of food security lies in insufficient income which does not get addressed (Hamelin et al., 2011). The need for these food support organizations is understandable, but there still appears to be a need for solutions that treat the problem of food insecurity rather than the symptom (Tarasuk et al., 2009).

A slightly different approach to the soup kitchen model has been adopted by a nationwide non-profit agency called Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC). According to Armitage (2015, pg.4), "CFCC is dedicated to increasing food access and culinary skills among the impoverished, alongside social justice and community health programs". Using an approach that includes the benefits of a soup kitchen where ready-made meals are available, these Community Food Centres (CFCs) also allow interested patrons to become involved in the food preparation process, learn skills while they work together in the kitchen, and have greater ownership over the food that they consume. CFCCs have locations in various cities within Canada; according to the CFCC website there are currently 14 CFCs with four in Ontario - Hamilton, Stratford, Perth and Toronto (CFCC, 2018). The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto is prominent in this regard. Established in the late 1970s, this organization supports people not only through respectful and dignified food distribution, but also supports their patrons in the areas of advocacy, self-sufficiency, social justice, and community development (Levkoe, 2003). There has been a gap in the food scene in Northwestern Ontario until now. However, with a local non-profit called Roots to Harvest transitioning into the Roots Community Food Centre, this gap is likely to be filled in the near future.

Even with the short-term relief these organizations provide for their patrons, these types of food support do not come without barriers. Despite food banks and soup kitchens presenting as reliable food access locations for many, Statistics Canada reported that in 2001, only 20% of the population who suffered from food insecurity actually accessed food support programs (Hamelin et al., 2011). Among families and households in Montreal, food bank use was surprisingly low compared to the perceived benefits of these programs, with only one-third of the sample size accessing the service (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009). This study concluded that food bank use had not helped to improve food security status, and was deemed as "a strategy of desperation, not a means of routine food acquisition" (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009, pg.138), resonating the thoughts presented in Tarasuk et al. (2009). The fact that food services exist with a target demographic in mind, and that same demographic is not making the most use of

these services, leads one to speculate what barriers may exist that are causing this gap in seeking support. These findings among a sample of food-insecure population led the researchers to speculate the need for research into the relevance and accessibility of these programs (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009). This sentiment was shared by Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, and Loopstra (2019) in their study with food insecure Canadian households. It can be considered that these challenges vary among demographics, and can be specific to different communities. It might, therefore, be important to narrow down on the barriers to food access for specific demographics when examining food support organizations active within a community.

A more long-term and permanent solution to food support can be seen in the form of food skills and food literacy, which may allow people to learn to budget their limited income, shop wisely, store their food appropriately, and make meals that stretch further into the week. Food habits for youth can be influenced by the knowledge and skill-levels of their teachers and caregivers (Korzun & Webb, 2014). Adults have a mentorship role in youths' lives during a time when lifelong habits develop, and this study highlights the importance of not only equipping youth with food literacy skills through structured programs at school, such as gardening and healthy snacking, but also the importance of training adults to encourage these practices in the lives of their youth (Korzun & Webb, 2014). This need has been highlighted in a recent paper which recognized the major role that at-home learning plays in food related skills and habits for young people, but found that skill sharing from parent to child has become less prominent over time, leading to a decline in skill level among youth (Martin & Massicotte, 2021). Programs that aim to teach parents and guardians alongside youth, and generate an interest in growing and cooking food through hands-on learning, may benefit youths' food habits and therefore physical and mental health in the long run. Such programs do exist in communities through efforts by organizations working with children and families, and studies scrutinizing the goals of such organizations, their strategies for assessing the needs of their clientele, and methods of program design and delivery, will shine a light on how effective their approaches are to filling the gaps in food literacy and food security.

It is apparent that organized efforts do exist within cities and communities to promote the various aspects of food security, but it has also been found that there is a lack of academic research into the operation and effectiveness of these programs (Haase, 2020). Haase (2020) found most of the initiatives to be designed by non-profit organizations working at the community level. Non-profits tend to produce gray literature in the form of reports mostly as a requirement for grants and funding, and these reports are often internal and do not get published on a public platform. As a result, the successes, challenges, and learnings from this diversity of efforts are only shared between a few organizations through networking and planned collaboration. This restricts the exchange of this knowledge to a wider audience, and prevents other organizations who are not part of that network from building on these experiences to improve their efforts. Documenting and synthesizing the work of various organizations ensures greater access to program learnings and allows researchers and policy makers

to further study these efforts in order to generate improved strategies, create supportive policies, and even generate new areas of funding to promote this work.

An instance of this kind of documentation has been found in a master's thesis by Globensky (2021), studying Roots to Harvest and their programs around collective cooking spaces. Globensky (2021) discussed various cooking programs that are aimed at using food skills to create community engagement, employment skills, reduce social isolation, and in the case of a school-based program, promote land-based learning. The thesis highlighted three different long-term skill development programs that this organization runs, something that is possible largely because of the industrial scale kitchen they have on their property. Globensky (2021) found that aside from getting more familiar with being in the kitchen and gaining experience learning about and working with food, participants also developed a sense of connection and belonging, brought on through the group setting of the programs. Information such as this could be of great value to other organizations aiming to achieve similar goals in their communities.

2.4 Summary

The concept of food security is multifaceted and has been evolving for some time. At present it is considered that food security is attained not just when everyone has enough to eat, but also when what and how people eat aligns with their personal values and preferences. This includes food that fits with people's dietary choices, as well as cultural preferences. The concept of food sovereignty touches on the concept of choice, ownership and decision making around people's eating behaviour. Achieving food security is not something that rests solely on the public or the government, it is a combination of having access to the appropriate resources, making the choice to use those resources, and having the capacity to utilize what is available that all determines the ultimate food security of an individual. While these resources need to be put in place by the government, food producers and suppliers, and community service organizations, there is also a need for education and awareness on how they are to be used.

Food security presents differently in various demographics, and one group that is particularly vulnerable is youth, who are in the stages of transitioning into adulthood. Food insecurity in the lives of this demographic not only has a physical impact, but also has an effect on their mental health and personal development leading to long-term complications later in life. This group is also one that may not have had the guidance for self-sufficiency around their food habits, and require support around various aspects of their lives. However, acquiring this support is often challenging for youth due to a number of barriers that may be present due to the life experiences they have had and the circumstances they are in. In addition, they often have hesitancy around seeking out the necessary support that would help them navigate these challenges.

While the issue of food security has been extensively discussed in existing literature, it was also observed that there is a gap in location-based studies in the context of urban,

Northwestern Ontario. Especially in a city with a high Indigenous population such as Thunder Bay, this kind of research will shed light on culture-specific needs and their role in food security for youth adapting to a western lifestyle, while maintaining connections to their roots. This research includes youth from a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to create a greater representation of youth in the community. Food support is mostly focused on donations and charity in the global north. It is important to offer skill-development based programming that offer not only temporary solutions, but prepare youth to become self-reliant on their food situations. This thesis examines the programs offered by secondary support organizations to understand the skills youth in Thunder Bay are being taught. Insight from the youth were also collected as a means of understanding how youth interact with these services, their experiences with receiving these skills, and which aspects of programming they found appropriate and helpful beyond the program. This research explores some of the reasons why youth are hesitant to use services available to them, in order to generate recommendations around service improvements.

Food support organizations have a goal to support the community in their needs and they do this through charitable meal programs, skill development programs, and strategies to create a greater connection between people and their food habits. While they have their hands full supporting those members who are accessing their services, there are a great many people who have the need but are unable to access for a variety of reasons. Needs assessment with youth who have limited or no access to these services will help organizations identify specific barriers youth have accessing their services, and will allow them the opportunity to improve their programs to be more inclusive. Aside from providing direct food support, organizations should also understand the importance of providing secondary support that allow their clients to become more self-reliant in their food habits, and should find ways to help youth navigate their needs that impact food access. In addition, in communities that are diverse in their ethnic demographics, food support organizations should ensure their patrons' cultural needs are being met.

While a lot of focus has been put on food security needs of recipients, this research also explores the roles of community support organizations, and their challenges, capacities, and barriers to providing the support they deem appropriate for the community. This research highlights the fact that food security is a multilevel process that includes efforts from food support organizations, funding organization, advocacy, government level decision making and policy changes, and that the needs of food support organizations limit the extent of support they can provide.

Another important contribution this research makes is introduce these community-based food security efforts to the academic circle. While organizations that work within a community often share knowledge and experiences within their community and help each other improve their support strategies, this could happen at a larger scale with information being shared across the country, which would help communities with similar dynamics learn from each other. This can be achieved through proper documentation of

activities in academic papers, which allows a greater reach with the audience and also opens up the opportunity for further research and improvements in this sector.

Chapter 3: Site Description

3.1 Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of Thunder Bay Residents

The study site chosen for this thesis is the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. Thunder Bay is an urban centre located in a wealthy province, but also a city that serves as a regional hub for remote Northern Ontario. While there are urban Indigenous people and people close to the poverty line in all Canadian cities, Thunder Bay has both a higher proportion of urban Indigenous people far from home (Levkoe et al., 2019), a lower diversity of employment opportunities for youth than most Canadian cities (Moazzami, 2019), and has a growing youth population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Thus, this city is an ideal place to study urban youth and food insecurity.

Thunder Bay occupies lands ceded to the Crown by the Ojibwe Chiefs as part of the 1850 Robinson-Superior Treaty (Crown Treaty No. 60) (Ontario, 2022). The Treaty surrendered most lands on the north shore of Lake Superior, with the exception of lands set out in the Schedule of Reservations (Robinson Treaty, 1850). One of these reserves, Fort William, is immediately adjacent to Thunder Bay on the south; however, areas to the north and west were covered by the North West Angle Treaty (1873, Treaty #3), the James Bay Treaty (1906, Treaty #9) and the Treaty #9 Adhesion (1930) (Ontario, 2022). All of these treaties guaranteed Indigenous groups the right to hunt and fish on unoccupied ceded lands, with cultivation and residence restricted to reservations (Government of Canada, 2020). Hunting and fishing rights, however, have been eroded in the southern part of the Treaty area by the establishment of titled land held by settlers, and in some northern areas through the establishment of parks and protected areas (Government of Canada, 2020).

In 1970 two cities merged to form Thunder Bay, now distinctly divided into the northern side Port Arthur and the southern side Fort William (Dunk, 2002). Fort William First Nation lies just south of Thunder Bay across the Kaministiquia River, and is accessible through Fort William via a bridge, or via Highway 61. Due to easy access, there is a high demand for tax-free gas at the reserve, and the City Road is lined with six gas stations within a span of a few kilometres. Within the city, the northern part serves as the business centre with more shops, restaurants, and entertainment, while the south side is more administrative with government buildings, as well as factories and industries (Talaga, 2017). At present, both sides have a downtown core and a mix of corporate and local businesses. Community based organizations and support services, both government and nongovernment, are established and active in both areas of Thunder Bay. Figure 2 shows a map of the city, with Port Arthur, Fort William, and Fort William First Nation.

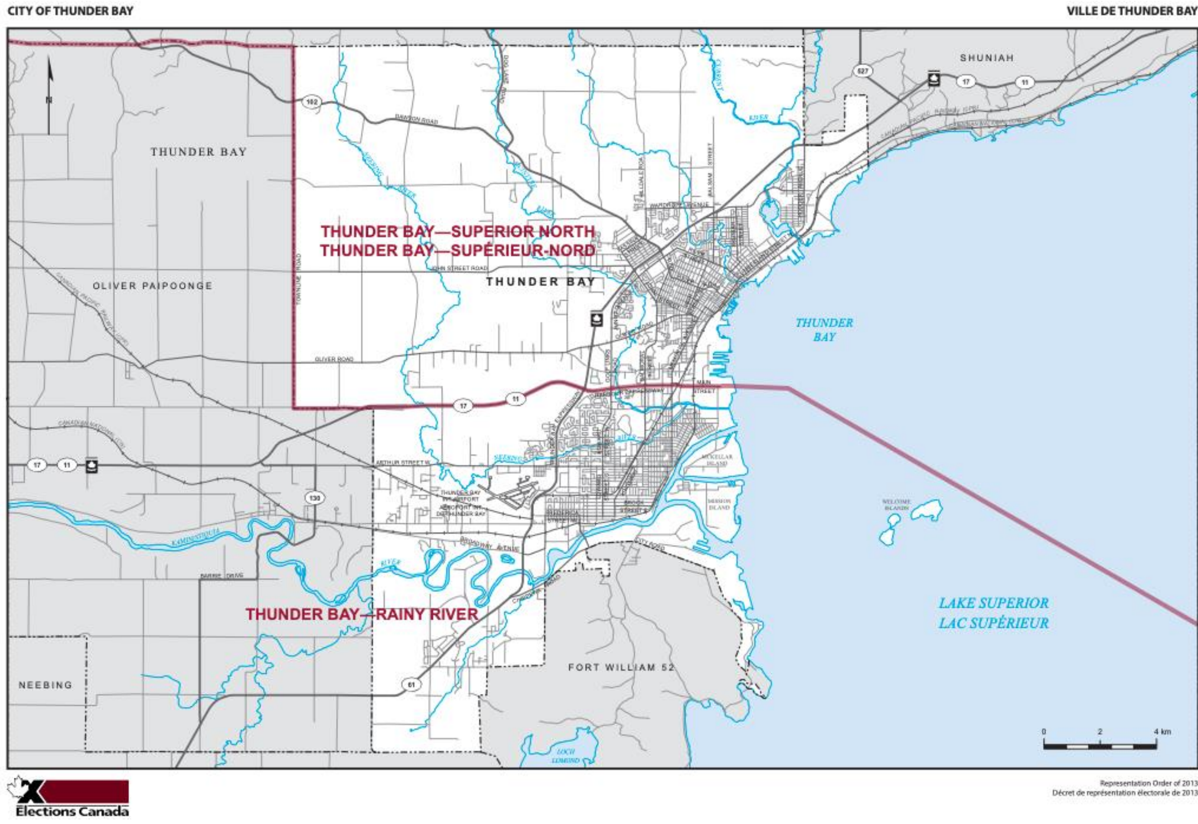


Figure 2: Map of Thunder Bay (Reprinted form Elections Canada, 2013)

Thunder Bay is known as the urban hub of Northwestern Ontario. Currently, it is the most populous city in this area, hosting 53% of the region's inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2022). In the last five years, the population of Thunder Bay saw an upward trend with a 1.3% increase, which is a deviation from the previous trend of 8% decline between 1991 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022; Moazzami, 2019). This trend has likely been fueled by Thunder Bay being home to Lakehead University and Confederation College, educational institutions attracting hundreds of students every year. This increase in population was also observed in the Northwestern Ontario region, with a 0.3% increase, and an overall increase in Ontario by 5.8%.

Although most of the original settlers to this region were of European descent, the ethnic diversity of Thunder Bay has increased in recent times. Not only has the city seen an influx of international students and their families because of the post-secondary institutions, the city has also welcomed many refugee families from the Middle East. In 2016 the percentage of immigrants residing in the city was at 8.8% and the visible minority population was 4% (Statistics Canada, 2017). As of 2016, there are also 8,535 immigrants residing in the city, and 825 non-permanent residents who are on work or study permit, or are refugee claimants (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The proportion of Indigenous population has also been increasing in Northwestern Ontario. Thunder Bay currently has the highest proportion of Indigenous Peoples in a city in Canada, with 15,075 people making up 12.5% of the city's population according

to the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017). This number is likely to be an underestimate, and with only 15% of Indigenous adults completing the 2016 census, the original population is likely to be two to four times greater (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). The majority (98%) of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay identify as First Nations and 1% identify as Métis; the remaining 1% identify as First Nations and Métis (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). According to a projection made by the Northern Policy Institute based on projections obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Finance, the Indigenous population is expected to grow at a rate of 21.5% and reach 26,462 people by 2030, reaching 15% of the city's total population (Moazzami, 2019).

Thunder Bay, as the largest regional service centre in Northwestern Ontario, hosts facilities and services including high school and post-secondary education, physical and mental health services, diverse employment opportunities, as well as shops, restaurants, and entertainment (Anderson & Kemp, 2012). Hundreds of Indigenous people living in surrounding communities access these facilities every year, some visiting the city temporarily and some moving permanently, and the actual number of Indigenous people in Thunder Bay is likely to be between 23,080 – 42,641 people (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). The proportion of youth in the Indigenous population is high, likely due to teenagers staying in the city due to school (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). A comparison of the age demographic of Thunder Bay's Indigenous and non-Indigenous population is presented in Figure 3.

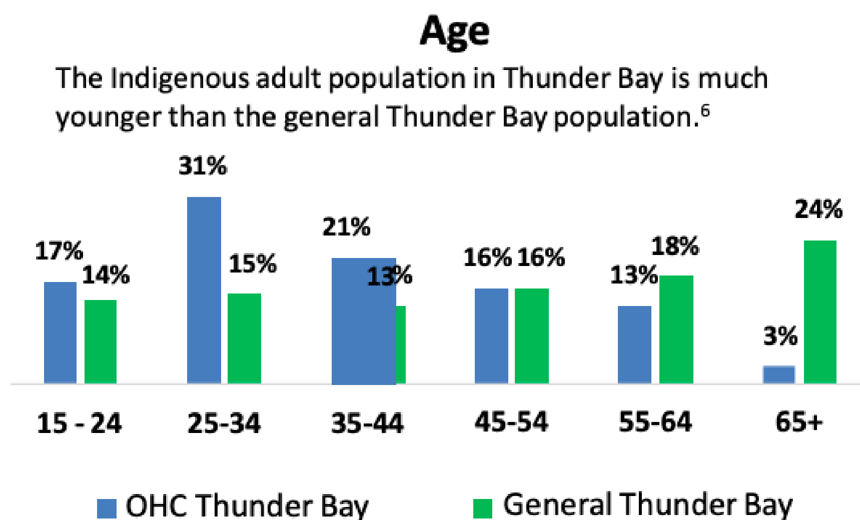


Figure 3: Age comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Thunder Bay (Reprinted form Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020)

Speaking to this, Guthrie (2020) stated the following in their master's thesis:

> The fourth phase of Aboriginal education in Canada, which extends to the present, is integration. In this phase Aboriginal students attend publicly funded schools in towns and cities. However, this is not true for students in remote First Nations communities, who remain in schools funded by INAC and run by a community-directed education council in their own communities. If these students

> decide to further their education beyond what is provided in their community (typically up to Grade 8), they must move from the federally funded on-reserve school into the provincial system. This often requires relocating many miles away from their family and community. (p. 2)

Youth who come to Thunder Bay to begin their high school education either attend one of the two federally funded Indigenous schools, or choose to attend one of the three Public or two Catholic high schools located in the city. At the young age of 14/15, this is often their first experience living alone, far away from the home they know, and without any family to support them. The cityscape presents an intricacy for them to navigate and sometimes this experience can be overwhelming (Guthrie, 2020). Added to that the fact that some of these youth may be coming from low-income families, adjusting to an urban lifestyle with little to no financial literacy skills can lead to impulsive spending. As they learn to navigate a westernized food scene with hundreds of choices and new items, youth may struggle with a lack of skills to manage their eating habits, leading to inadequacies in their dietary patterns. While some of these youth move here with their families, many stay with boarding homes (Anderson & Kemp, 2012). In such situations where youth are dependent on adults they do not have close relationships with, youth may experience a lack of control over their lives and their food choices.

Thunder Bay has a sizable youth population, and because of the high population of children this number is likely to increase in the future. Looking at the 2016 census data, the total number of youth between the ages of 15 and 29 makes up 18% of the total population of the city (Statistics Canada, 2017). Interestingly, while 28% of the total Thunder Bay population consists of people under the age of 25, 46% of Indigenous people fall into that category (Corporate Strategic Plan, 2015). While the Indigenous population has a greater proportion of young people in the demographic, promising an increase in school-going and working age population in the near future, the non-Indigenous demographic of Thunder Bay actually has more people in the older age group and less who will be entering school and work. Data shows that people over 65 years of age make up 20.5% of the non-Indigenous population, while for Indigenous people this is 6%; and children under 14 make up 13.1% of the non-Indigenous population, while for Indigenous people this is 27.8% (Statistics Canada, 2017). It can therefore be inferred that in the future a large population of youth in Thunder Bay will be of Indigenous identity.

3.2 Experiences of Indigenous Youth in Thunder Bay

The impact of Canada's residential school system is still fresh in a city like Thunder Bay, which is in close proximity to numerous drive and fly-in communities to the north. In Ontario, Residential Schools started closing down in the 1940s (Yantha, 2020). However, the last one to close in Thunder Bay was the St. Joseph's Indian Residential School in 1966, where a Catholic senior elementary school now stands. Although there is no longer an enforcement practice to bring youth from reserve communities to attend school in the city, the lack of high schools in many reserves still push a lot of young people to travel to the city to live with relatives or at boarding houses in order to receive

proper education (Talaga, 2017). Leaving home and learning to be independent at the age of 14/15 years is a difficult task by any measure, and a lack of proper support and guidance would naturally impact a young person's success in school.

Indigenous youth face particular challenges in Thunder Bay. The city has a well-publicized reputation for discrimination, racism, and a lack of security, and this reputation has come to national attention due to a series of events including the deaths of at least nine Indigenous youths (McNeilly, 2018) and the Brayden Bushby case (Hay, 2019). In 2018, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) report *Broken Trust* identified serious systemic racism in the Thunder Bay police force. In fact, the inquest into these deaths led to the finding that many of the suspicious deaths of Indigenous youth that were reported had been declared as accidents (Chartran & Lampron, 2020). It was also found that "the TBPSB [Thunder Bay Police Service Board] reacted to the cases of the missing Indigenous youths with less urgency and diligence than they would if it was a non-Indigenous person" (Chartran & Lampron, 2020, pg.238). A 2016 newspaper article, published during an inquest, quoted a government official discussing the stark difference between the welcoming of refugees and immigrant families into the community, and the ill treatment of First Nations youth who are part of the same community (Porter, 2016). Experiences and stories such as this may discourage Indigenous youth from seeking help from authorities if and when they need it, and create a lack of trust in systems and the government.

Difficult experiences faced by youth in the community have also been shared by the youth themselves. In 2019, a project by Diversity Thunder Bay (DTB) gathered high school youth from all the Public and Catholic schools in the city, as well as the two federal institutions, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, and Matawa Education and Care Centre. The youth were invited to share their experiences of racism and other challenges they had faced while navigating a life in the city. Indigenous participants stated that they sometimes felt less safe in the city than they did in their home communities due to discrimination (Hughes, 2020). Youth reported instances of being called names and having comments thrown at them by strangers, Indigenous girls being mistaken for sex workers, and experiences of lateral violence form older, more urbanized Indigenous youth looking to exploit newcomers to the city (Hughes, 2020).

Challenges such as this not only take a toll on youths' self-esteem, self-worth, and mental health, but also manifest in their everyday lives as inadequacies in the eyes of society. Differences in success rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in the Canadian school system show lower completion rates, higher likelihoods of dropping-out, and lower academic achievements among Indigenous students (Guthrie, 2020). The younger generation of Indigenous youth also have a lower rate of high school completion compared to the older generation - for example 74% on Indigenous youth aged between 25 and 44 do not have their high school diploma, while the same is true for 59% of Indigenous adults over 45 years of age (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay have been found to be less likely to graduate and more likely to be unemployed compared to their non-Indigenous peers. According to Anishnawbe Mushkiki (2020), 67% of Indigenous adult in Thunder Bay are unemployed,

and among those who are employed, four out of five people fall below the before-tax Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO); overall 89% of Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay live below the LICO.

Poverty and income being a large factor in food security, it is not a stretch to conclude that these youth often also struggle with having enough to eat (Levkoe et al., 2019).

Indigenous youth often have these challenges on top of the regular challenges all youth in the city face, as will be discussed in the next section. While programs and services geared towards the general youth demographic have the capacity to support Indigenous youth to some extent, the additional challenges may need more individualized and targeted support. Such support may have the capacity to help youth learn to navigate their needs, as well as teach them strategies to cope with the difficulties in their lives.

3.3 Youth as a Focus for Food Security Barriers

When it comes to youth, especially with data showing a growing population in this demographic, it is apparent that this group needs particular support, care and guidance. This is true for not only Indigenous youth, but youth from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds facing social and economic barriers. A community report found that 11% of the youth in Thunder Bay fell into the NEET group, specified as Not in Education, Employment or Training (Abebe et al., 2019). In addition, they also found that 35.4% of children starting school demonstrated low scores on Early Development Indicators (EDI) (Abebe et al., 2019). The authors identified that these two factors are known indicators of poverty. Poverty can lead to insecurities in a lot of different areas in life, and children growing up in an environment of deficit could develop inferiorities around self-worth and self-image, which may lead to more permanent impacts around their success as adults.

Indeed, according to 2016 census data cited in their report, Abebe et al. (2019) stated that 10.9% of Thunder Bay households had less than $20,000 as their annual income, and a little over 20% of households made less than $40,000 annually. 21.5% of children under 17 were found to live in low-income households, which coincides with the NEET and EDI findings (Abebe et al., 2019). In Thunder Bay, poverty is more prominent in certain vulnerable demographics which includes newcomers, single parent households, youth, Indigenous people, women and seniors, racialized people, and persons with disabilities and mental illnesses (TBAFS, 2015). As discussed before, there is a correlation between poverty and food insecurity, and it has been found that these groups also suffer from higher rates of food insecurity (TBAFS, 2015).

The above data pertains to the overall population of Thunder Bay, which includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous households. Challenges with education, income, poverty and food security exist for all low-income populations in the city, and can be particularly detrimental to the youth demographic. This is why, when studying barriers and solutions to food insecurity, it is important to include youth from all demographics within Thunder Bay. The needs of these diverse demographics should be investigated in order to reach those who cannot access services due to unique barriers. As a

community which will have to eventually rely on their children as taxpayers to support the aging population, greater investments in their success should be made now.

For the purpose of this thesis, food support organizations will include primary and secondary support organizations. Primary support includes food banks, soup kitchens, soup vans, and other similar direct support. Secondary support includes programs aimed at providing skills and knowledge for long-term improvements in youths' lives, which either use food as a major component (such as in cooking programs) or a minor component (incentive of a meal). Food support can also come from organizations that serve a completely different purpose such as addictions treatment or healthcare, who have a component of snacks or meals for their clients; these organizations will not be included in the parameters of this research because they do not have a significant impact on food security beyond circumstantial relief.

Various community initiatives, both government funded and non-profit based programs, are in place to support people's food needs in the city. These services provide umbrella support that is available to youth from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Data relevant to income and housing, use of food support, and various food support options in Thunder Bay obtained from the 2015 Food Strategy report card is presented in Figures 4a, 4b and 4c. Although the information is from a few years ago, this provides an overall picture of how food security and access look like in Thunder Bay.

Measures of Income, Poverty, and Homelessness	Indicator	Measured Over
Percentage of people living below the poverty line, using the Low Income Measure (after tax) in the Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) [5]	12.8%	2011
Approximate number of people living under the poverty line (using the Low Income Measure) in the Thunder Bay CMA [6]	15,100	November 2011
Median total annual family income (after tax) of all low income family types in Thunder Bay [7]	$12,970	2011
Unemployment rate in Thunder Bay CMA [8]	5.3%	November 2015
Households in the Thunder Bay District who receive social assistance benefits (Ontario Works or Ontario Disability) [9]	8,466	2015
Social housing vacancy rate in Thunder Bay [10]	2.5%	2015
Active households on waitlist for social housing in Thunder Bay [11]	939	2015
Number of social housing units in Thunder Bay [12]	4,201	2015
Average number of people using emergency shelters in Thunder Bay [13]	1,267	2011

Figure 4a: Thunder Bay Measure of Income, Poverty and Homelessness (Reprinted from TBAFS, 2015)

Measures of Emergency Food Programs and Usage	Indicator	Measured Over
Number of food banks [23]	19	2015
Average number of people accessing food banks per month [24]	3,447	March 2015
Daily emergency meal programs available [25]	7	2015
Average number of meals served by emergency meal programs each month [26]	9,000	March 2015

Figure 4b: Thunder Bay Measure of Emergency Food Programs and Usage (Reprinted from TBAFS, 2015)

Measures of Participatory Initiatives Engaging People in their own Food Security	Indicator	Measured Over
Number of Good Food Boxes sold [29]	4,568 family sized boxes 748 single sized boxes	2014
Number of Good Food Box host sites [30]	33	2015
Number of Student Nutrition Programs in the Thunder Bay area [31]	52	2015
Number of people who participated in the Gleaning Program [32]	218	2015
Amount of food gleaned [33]	7600 pounds	2015
Number of people fed through the Gleaning Program [34]	1,148	2015
Number of Mobile Market days [35]	8	2015
Number of Mobile Market locations [36]	1	2015
Number of Community Kitchen Programs available to the public [37]	24	2015
Number of Community Gardens [38]	25	2015
Pounds of meat distributed through the Moose on the Loose program [39]	1400 pounds of meat distributed to 84 families	2014

Figure 4c: Measures of Food Access Areas in Thunder Bay (Reprinted from TBAFS, 2015)

Food banks and soup kitchens do not collect data pertaining to the race or ethnicity of their patrons, deeming it intrusive and unnecessary. However, it can be said that their clientele is not limited to people of one certain background. Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who come from low-income families often face similar barriers to accessing food in terms of housing instability, lack of cooking skills, challenges with mental and physical health, non-supportive home environments, and barriers with seeking support. In addition, youth from diverse cultural backgrounds may have similar connections with their traditions and practices, and seek comfort in the food they grew up with. In a diverse and dynamic city such as Thunder Bay, the challenges of food insecurity affect youth of all demographics. The focus of this thesis will therefore not be limited to Indigenous youth, but a diversity of youth will be included in the discussion to identify both common and unique barriers.

3.4 Food Access in Thunder Bay

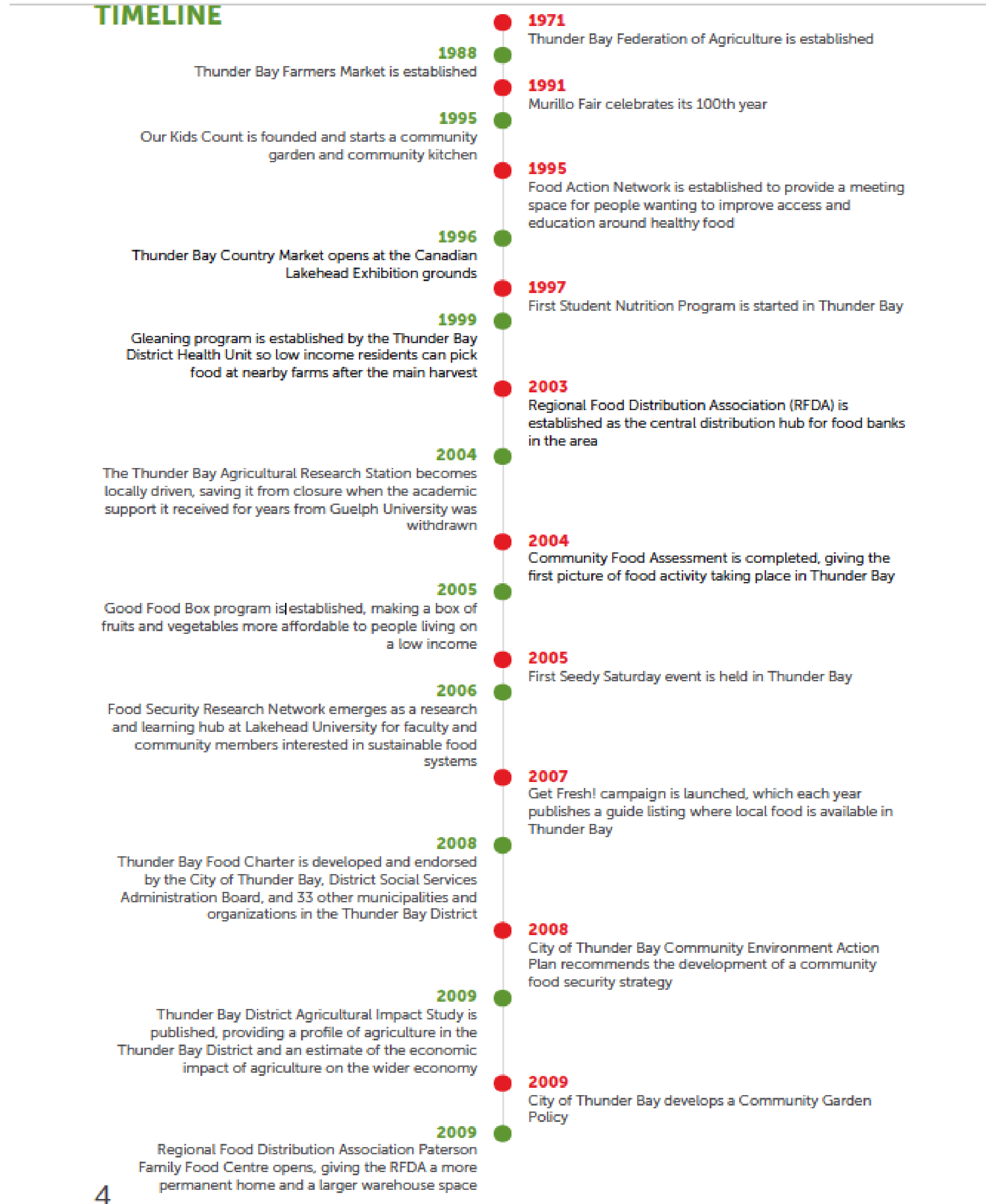


Figure 5: Timeline of progression of the food scene in Thunder Bay (reprinted from TBAFS, 2015)

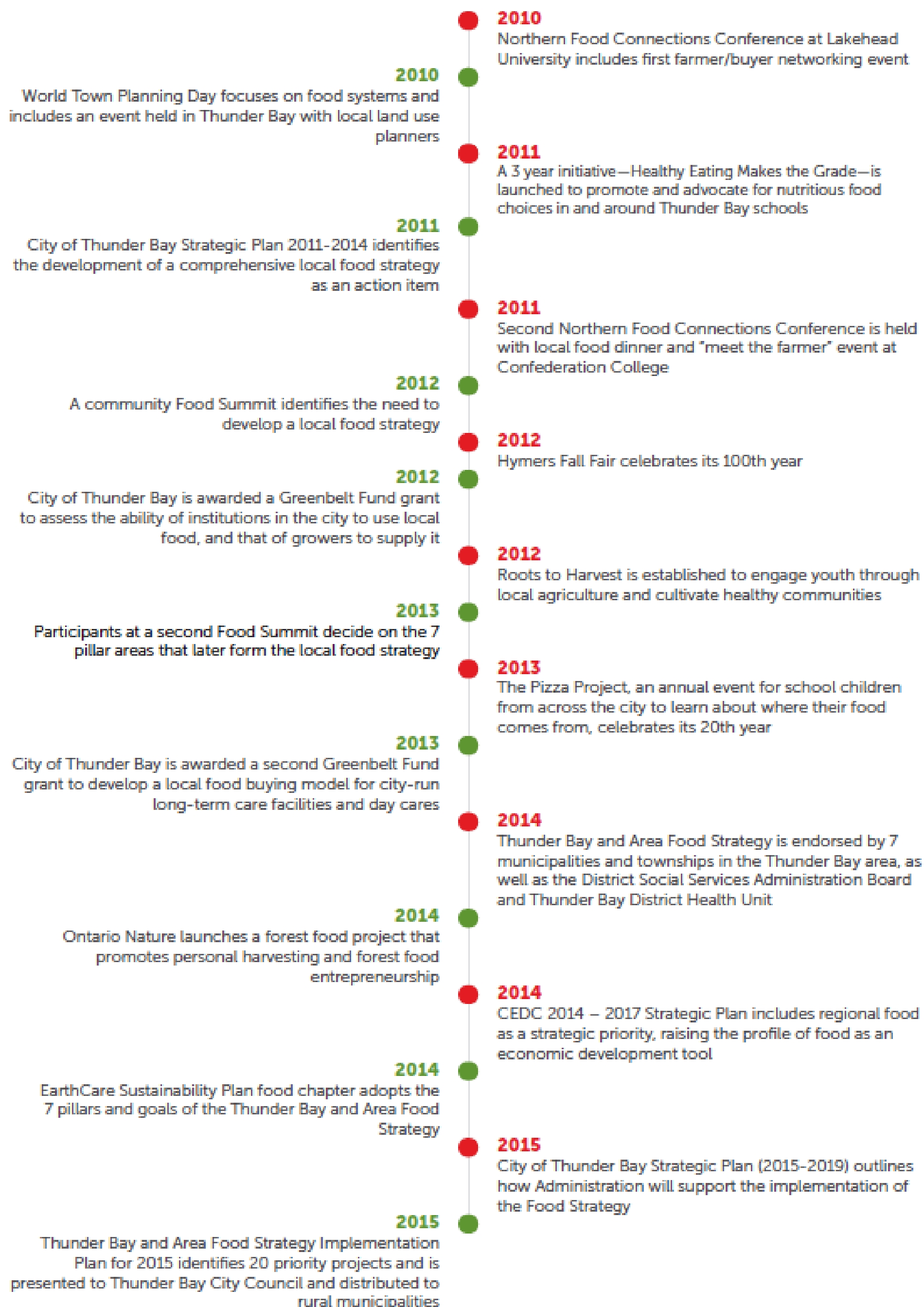


Figure 5 (continued): Timeline of progression of the food scene in Thunder Bay (reprinted from TBAFS, 2015)

Since its establishment in 1970, Thunder Bay has seen gradual development in its food production and distribution sectors. At the community level, this started with the farmers' market in 1988 and led way to community kitchens and gardens, education and awareness for the public, food programs at schools, gleaning programs, food sovereignty initiatives such as seed sales, urban farm site development and youth employment. Various initiatives also took place at the municipality and city levels as

well, leading to advocacy, collaboration, and planning, ultimately leading to the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy in 2015. Figure 5 shows the progression of the food scene in the city from 1971 to 2015, taken from the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy's Community Food Security Report Card (TBAFS, 2015). This provides a timeline on how different aspects of food availability and distribution were identified in this area, and the establishments of various bodies to facilitate the process. While this material is a very high-level overview, detailed reports are often produced at the organizational level containing more information on the work being carried out. Such reports have been extensively used in this thesis to gather information at the local level. It is of interest to note that a wealth of information is often reported in gray literature which is only available internally within organizations.

One such source that has provided a thorough summary of the food scene in Thunder Bay is the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (TBAFS), which is highlighted as the last two green dots on the second page of Figure 5. This is a coalition of partners representing various players in the food system including farmers, institutions, government, and food security organizations, and was founded in 2014 with the goal of "creating a healthy, equitable, and sustainable food system that contributes to the economic, ecological, and social well-being and health of the city of Thunder Bay and Area" (TBAFS, 2022). Built on seven pillars that each represent an important aspect of the local food system, TBAFS produces report cards discussing the status of each pillar and the concerns that need to be addressed. Many such reports have been used in this thesis to discuss local initiatives; however, one that stands out is a "Where to Find Food" brochure that was developed by the Emergency Food Response (EFR) team. This is a collaboration of organizations who stepped up to provide direct food support to community members in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a regularly updated document which contains up-to-date timing and locations for food access within the city, which not only helps people plan their visits to these places, but also provides information on locations many people may not have known about. A copy of this brochure is provided in Appendix A. An overview of organizations that have been working in Thunder Bay around food support since before the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as those that transitioned into food support as a response to the pandemic, is listed in Appendix B.

Thunder Bay has support from various local governments, businesses, organizations, and individuals to provide food support during times of need. Due to the informal nature of food support provided at various organizations, an accurate estimate of food access throughout the community is difficult to obtain. Soup kitchens and many smaller food banks do not have a registration process, and while some keep count of the numbers of meals served each day, this is not formally reported. The biggest soup kitchen in Thunder Bay, the Dew Drop Inn, served 90,434 meals in 2019, 110,565 meals in 2020 and 121,072 meals in 2021, as posted on their social media. Many of the people visiting soup kitchens are regulars, while some people access this support only a few times per month. Feed Ontario, which provides fresh food to food banks, often gathers data from its member organizations. According to their website, food banks in Thunder Bay were

visited by 8267 people in the Thunder Bay-Atikokan electoral riding, and by 4233 people in the Thunder Bay-Superior North electoral riding, in 2018 (Feed Ontario, 2018).

During the pandemic, city-wide initiatives were geared towards school children, low-income households, and seniors. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic alerted us that food access within the community was not consistent, but there was a lack of partnership between organizations providing food support and organizations distributing the food (CEFRP, 2020). The need to streamline food between distributors and recipients led to the development of the Community Emergency Food Response Plan (CEFRP) in 2020, led by the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (TBAFS) and the city of Thunder Bay's Crime Prevention Council.

The CEFRP conducted a community wide assessment to determine food security needs for local public, and interviewed people who had accessed emergency food support during the pandemic between March and June 2020. It was found that 70% of the participants had accessed these supports even prior to the onset of COVID-19 (CEFRP, 2020). This demonstrates the high need for direct food support in the community. The responses of participants to food access sources are provided in Figure 6. Out of the 46 organizations that were part of this survey, 91% (41 organizations) included food as an aspect of their programming (CEFRP, 2020). These organizations fall in the areas of community support, including "social services, Indigenous organizations, emergency food, health, mental health, education, emergency shelter, and political/territorial" (CEFRP, 2020, p. 8). Figure 7 provides a breakdown of the different ways food is made available to community members in Thunder Bay (CEFRP, 2020).

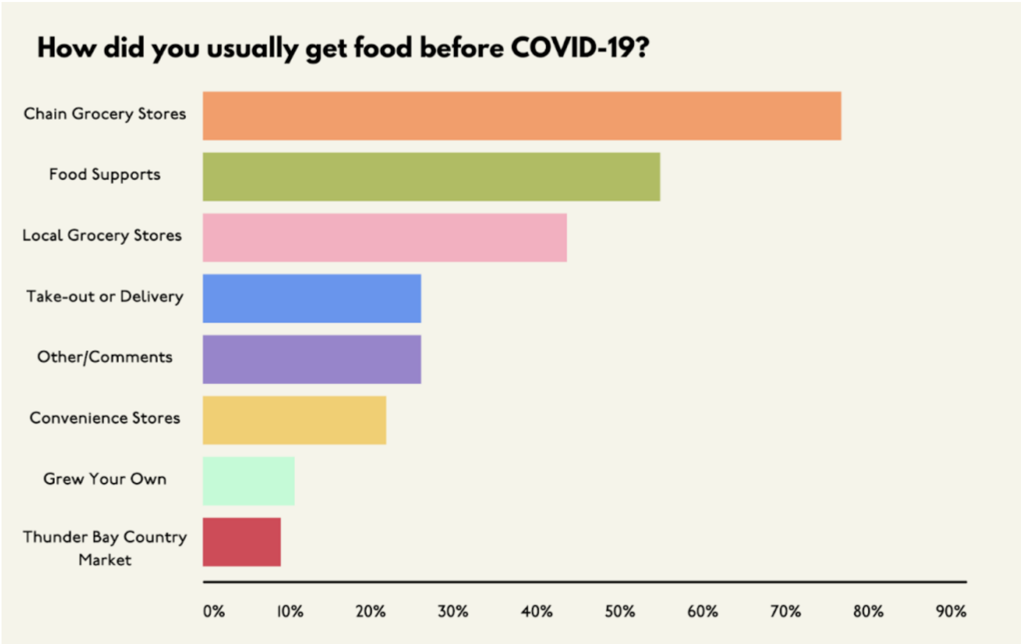


Figure 6: Food Access sources used by Emergency Food Service users in Thunder Bay, ON (CEFRP, 2020)

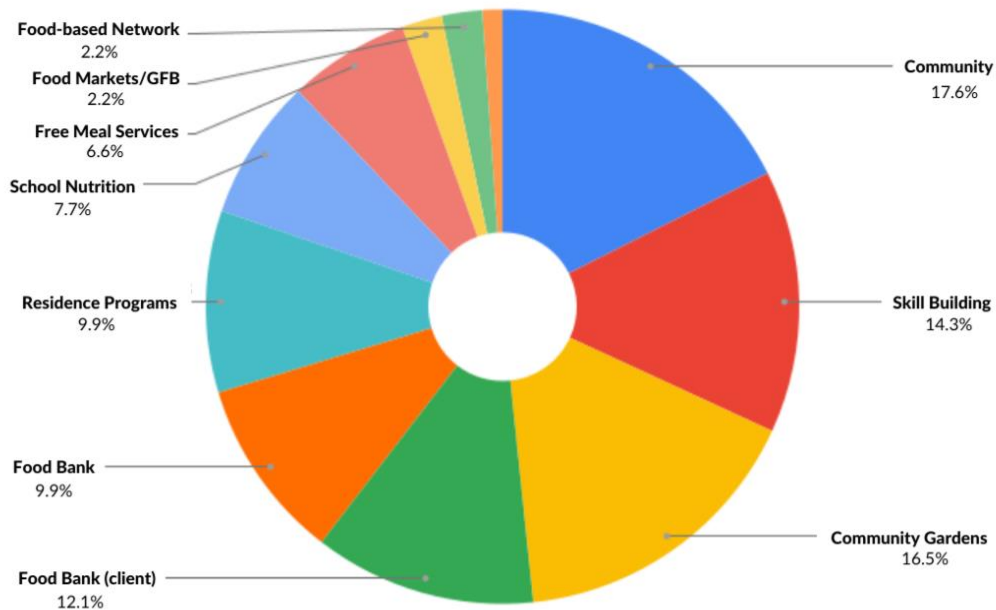


Figure 7: Breakdown of food services active in Thunder Bay, pre-pandemic (CEFRP, 2020)

An important finding that emerged during the pandemic was that offering wrap-around support around accessing food was just as important as direct food provision. This included raising awareness of where food was available, ways to get there, delivering food for those unable to travel, or connecting people to food services who did not have phones or internet, among many others (CEFRP, 2020). The summary is presented in Figure 8.

One of the biggest transitions that is happening in Thunder Bay currently is the formation of a Community Food Centre through Root to Harvest. This organization has been working in the area of food literacy and life-skills support through community programs and supportive employment for some time now. Recently, the organization expanded their building space by purchasing a large area adjacent to their industrial kitchen and office, and has started the process of transforming this into a kitchens and dining facility for community members. Located in the middle of Port Arthur and Fort William, close to bus stops, this seems to be the perfect location for a new CFC to establish. Aside from a space to come together and cook, this CFC will provide a place to receive support and advocacy around life's various needs through a Community Navigator.

Direct Offering of Food	Assistance Getting Food	Other
47% - Food Hampers 28% - Offering Meals 28% - Weekly Food Packages 26% - Food Bank 17% - Good Food Box	63% - Referring Clients 52% - Advocating for Clients 45% - Delivering Good Hampers 36% - Providing Gift Cards 21% - Supporting Procurement 15% - Delivering Meals	23% - Other 19% - Provided Funding to Programs/Services

Figure 8: Types of support offered in Thunder Bay during the pandemic (CEFRP, 2020)

It is largely apparent that there is a need for food support in this community, not only because of the financial and social challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, but also because of financial and social struggles residents have experienced long before that. Food banks and soup kitchens in Thunder Bay almost always have long lines of people waiting to take their turn receiving food, and often it may look like the community is being served adequately. However, only observing people who have made it to the doors of these institutions overlooks the needs of those who are not able to make it that far. During the pandemic, organizations in this city have focused efforts to identify the public's needs and to support them accordingly. New insights have been recognized from surveys and reports, and organizations are implementing these ideas in their operations. This city also has several secondary support programs in place which assist people with skill and knowledge development. These programs provide longer-term support, and provide people with the tools they can use to manage respective lifestyles.

3.5 Food Support Organizations in Thunder Bay

Thunder Bay currently has a number of primary and secondary support organizations serving the community, and almost all of them include a component of food access, either as part of their programming, or as an added incentive.

According to the 'Where to Find Food' brochure, there are 13 food banks and 8 soup kitchens operating within the city (TBDHU, 2021). They are all located at different neighbourhoods and have varying times of service, which allow people to access them at their convenience. Some of the food banks require pre-registration, but all of the soup kitchens are available to anyone who visits. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, food support organizations have centralized their registration process, and patrons need to call the number 211 in order to register for service. There are also overnight shelters geared towards adults, and residents are provided with meals, among other supports.

Many of the food banks and soup kitchens are members of the Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA), who supply large quantities of food including meats and fresh produce. The RFDA conducts food drives at local grocery stores, and also obtains rescued food, which they supply to food support organizations. Two organizations supply local schools with fresh fruits and snacks, the Red Cross and the

Thunder Bay District Health Unit. These snacks and breakfast items are provided to all students in the schools they are involved with, something the students have come to rely on. During school closures due to the pandemic, the Red Cross diverted their funds to Roots to Harvest, who then organized the arrangement and distribution of food bags to students undergoing online learning.

When it comes to secondary food support organizations, cooking programs are the most prominent form of food literacy skill development. Organizations such as Boys and Girls Club, Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, NorWest Community Health Centres, Our Kids Count, Roots to Harvest, and Youth Move are some of the organizations that work with community members though community kitchens, cooking classes, and cooking demos, to create engagement and generate interest in healthy eating. Cooking programs at most of these organizations need registration, and in some cases are open only to existing clients. In addition to skills development, some of these organizations provide support with food access as well, and were particularly proactive with distribution of emergency food during the pandemic.

Other than cooking programs, organizations also encourage youth to learn about food systems through gardening. Every high school in Thunder Bay, and many of the elementary schools, have schoolyard gardens which are planted, maintained, and harvested by students. Roots to Harvest works in collaboration with most of these schools to introduce youth to food production, as well as cooking with harvested food. This organization also has two urban garden sites in the city, where they run seasonal employment programs. The produce harvested from their fields is used in their cooking programs, and sold at farmgate markets. Roots to Harvest also runs an affordable food market, which sells fresh produce at wholesale prices. They have recently transitioned into a Community Food Centre, expanding the number of people they can support, and creating a space where people can not only access food, but also be involved in the cooking process, socialize with others, and receive support around a variety of life's needs.

Many of the organizations in Thunder Bay work in partnership with each other, referring clients as needed and providing wrap-around support. This was particularly important during the COVID-19 Pandemic. A number of food support organizations collaborated to form the Emergency Food Response team. At monthly meetings, representatives discussed changes and updates to their working model and informed each other of their ongoing support and services, which was compiled and provided to the public in the form of a brochure, to facilitate efficient access to food.

Despite all of these programs and services actively running within the community, food insecurity among youth is still a common phenomenon. Programs serving the entire community often don't have the resources or the capacity to focus on the needs of a particular demographic, and many youth with barriers may slip through the cracks. In this thesis, primary and secondary food support initiatives in Thunder Bay will be explored, both from the perspectives of the youth and the staff at these sites. Not only will gaps between the needs youth have and the support they receive be identified, but

the barriers that are often not talked about, and therefore not addressed, will also be highlighted. Thunder Bay has an abundance of resources geared towards supporting its residents. It is important to revisit some of their needs assessment and program delivery models to ensure they develop a capacity to reach all those who need them.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Positionality

I have undertaken this research project as part of my master's thesis through the University of Waterloo. My interest in food security and the experiences of urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth is fairly recent, and has been shaped by the last few years of my life spent in Thunder Bay.

My interest in youth food security began with my work at a non-profit organization, Roots to Harvest. I worked as a Youth Program Facilitator focusing on education, employment, and engagement by using food as a tool for connection. This allowed me to work closely with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth aged 15-20 years. In addition to learning about food literacy, the supported employment program taught me more about the needs of youth in terms of having support and essential life skills. It was then that I started seeing youth as a vulnerable demographic, and focused on my role as a supportive adult in their lives to develop trusting relationships, advocate for their needs, and connect them with resources.

This connection further allowed me the privilege of learning more about the lives of these youth and I started seeing the immense number of obstacles they had to overcome every day. While there were resources in place to help and support these youth, there were still gaps between these resources and the youth needing to access them; there were bridges that needed to be built. Youth feel vulnerable and often have difficulty trusting authority figures because of past experiences, added to which some have mental health barriers such as depression and anxiety, and all of these together hinder a young individual's personal and professional growth. Although I did not know it then, these observations involving the youth who had become such an important and constant part of my life is what set the premise of my thesis.

Another aspect which surprised me was the racism that certain youth face in Thunder Bay. Given the location of this city close to many northern reserve communities, and being 15 minutes from Fort William First Nation reserve, a large number of the youth I worked with identified as Indigenous. Being a member of a visible minority group myself, I have experienced my fair share of discrimination in Canada, be it because of my skin or my accent. What baffled me was not only the level of discrimination the First Peoples of this land faced, but that I, an outsider, found myself being treated with more respect and trust than the Indigenous teenagers I worked with.

With more time spent with youth at work and often providing various support outside of work hours, it soon became clear to me that I had a unique access to the lives and stories of these youth, and I had developed a level of trust which would allow them to speak with me freely. In fact, I may not even have developed such an interest in this topic if it had not been for the youth allowing me such privileged insights into their lives. I believe that these trusting relationships formed because of the approach I took when I first started my job. To the youth, I was someone new to the country with much to learn.

I was approachable, and they opened up quickly and shared stories of struggles and accomplishments in their lives. I believe I also made an impression on them in terms of cultural exchange, and after making a curry for my first group of youth employees it became a tradition to do so for every group that followed. Food has a way of bringing people together, and while we ate, I got to learn a lot about their experiences with food.

I feel that because of my experience being so deeply involved in the lives of these youth during a very impressionable age of transitioning from late teen to adulthood, I have gained insight into the habits and choices that shape their lives as adults in society. Having worked with only a handful of youth, I realized that they share common themes in the difficulties they face. I wanted to bring out the voices of these youth which so often go unheard, largely because there is a lack of a safe, patient, and accommodating platform available to them. Working in the area of youth support, I am well aware of the diversity of resources these youth have at their disposal, but through this research I hope to highlight the subtle, often unseen barriers that youth face which prevent them from taking full advantage of these services. This thesis is therefore an attempt to bring attention to these difficulties, which could possibly lead to more action around supporting these needs.

Research Design and Implementation

This research study was carried out in Thunder Bay, ON, with primary data collection between October and November 2021. The University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board approved this study (REB 43470), and all directives provided by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit around the COVID-19 pandemic were maintained.

For this study, I chose to collect primary data from two groups of people: a) the youth who have experience with food support organizations in Thunder Bay and b) the staff who work with these organizations and make decisions about the design and delivery of services. A different questionnaire was used for each group, as well as different approaches.

Data collection was conducted through in-person and video-call interviews with 23 youth participants, as well as 13 staff participants from eight food support organizations, and one Indigenous Elder who collaborated with a number of different organizations in the community. Saunders et al. (2017) had discussed 'saturation' in sample size as the point where the researcher feels no new information can be obtained from including further participants in the sample. In this thesis, although 23 youth participants and 14 staff participants provided sufficient data, more interviews could have been conducted to include a more representative sample of the Thunder Bay youth and support organizations. Time was a limiting factor in interviews, which prevented the sample size from reaching saturation. Moreover, with staff participants, saturation may have been difficult to reach, as organizations had diverse approaches to food supports, as well as different operational models.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed through an online software (Otter.ai). This data was further sorted using a Phenomenological Analysis technique adapted from Smith and Osborn (2007), Thorne (2000), Noon (2018) and Tuffour (2017).

The following section will go into greater detail about the processes involved in the methodology of this research.

4.2 Ethics Approval

This research was planned to take place in the summer of 2021, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Due to restrictions around meeting participants indoors and in-person, the data collection strategy changed from an indoor group setting to a one-on-one outdoor setting. Approval from the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board was received in October 2021, and data collection took place in October and November of that year.

4.3 Youth Participant Recruitment and Research Methods

As the primary researcher who was present on site for the duration of this research study, I have been able to utilize my experience in and connection with the Thunder Bay community to aid in my research process. I have been living and working in Thunder Bay in a youth centric environment since 2018, in a role supporting youth through school and employment-based programs. A large part of this programming was support around life skills. This taught me practices in rapport building, creating trusting relationships, and applying empathy and active listening, all of which led to gathering relevant information about the youths' lives which would allow for appropriate support.

When it comes to qualitative data collection, often the most thorough and flexible approach to information gathering takes place through interviews. Not surprisingly, this method has been used in many other studies involving Canadian youth, including Small, Fast, Krusi, Wood and Kerr (2009), Islam, Multani, Hynie, Shakya, and McKenzie (2017) and (Hill, 2021). A concise overview of this research approach has been presented by Prior (2017), one that also complements my research goals:

> A familiar and highly adaptable research method, the qualitative interview has proven invaluable in investigating people's beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on a variety of topics and concerns, and it has been widely used in eliciting stories of personal experience and their meanings as well as generating insights into the human condition that may otherwise go unnoticed and unanalyzed. (p. 2)

This is deeply relevant to my research goals in particular because I wanted to highlight the food access scenario in Thunder Bay through the lived experiences of youth who are part of this scene. I used a semi-structured interview approach, and allowed the conversation to be navigated by the interviewee. This allowed the youth to have control over the narrative they were sharing and promoted a sense of safety, which is important

when opening up about vulnerabilities. I kept my questions open ended and followed the story as the participant told it, only interrupting to bring focus to certain areas. I used my prior relationships with the participants to generate a space of trust and comfort which allowed the youth to open up and provide in-depth information about their feelings and experiences. I found this to be especially helpful when some of the youth I had interviewed had already disclosed their food security issues to me in the past, and revisiting that topic was less of a barrier the second time around. Prior (2017, p. 3) has highlighted rapport as "affiliation and empathy" which can help a researcher obtain personal information through an expression of solidarity with the participants through a display of relatability and understanding of not only the participants' experience, but also their thoughts and feelings regarding those experiences. Having used this technique in my past work with youth, this was a natural skill that was implemented in these interviews as well.

In section 2.2 I had discussed the need to understand the barriers to food security experienced by youth who are not connected to any primary or secondary support organizations. However, in my research I have chosen to focus on youth who do have experience with these organizations, to obtain a preliminary baseline understanding of their interactions with support, and to understand the limitations that exist with access. The hope is that once these barriers are identified and addressed, this will promote and facilitate food access for those youth who are actively participating. Going forward, resources could then be focused on those youth who present further barriers to access, and additional steps could be taken.

This thesis focused on the former approach for two reasons. One was the limitation presented by time, which restricted my data collection to two months, allowing me to speak with only a limited number of participants who were more accessible through personal and organizational contacts. The other limitation was the scope of the research itself, which was restricted by time and regulations around in-person contact. An expansion of the current research would allow for a more selective participant recruitment method. This would require hands-on and persistent recruitment processes, and approaching youth at locations unrelated to primary or secondary support, such as housing complexes, bus stations, shopping malls, and other public gathering locations, which would require further steps around approvals and ethics. Research such as this will heavily rely on in-person rapport building, and can only take place once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Participant recruitment took place mainly through personal connection with the youth. Individuals between the ages of 18 and 30, who were known to me to have accessed food support in the past, were contacted with an interview request. Participants were offered an incentive of a $10 gift card as well as a meal from any restaurant of their choice. I was told by many participants that the meal was the main reason they agreed to participate in the interview. There were some youth who said no to participating upon the initial request. However, none of those who agreed to participate withdrew or retracted any of the information they provided. In addition to reaching out personally, I also put-up posters at three food support organizations in the city including one soup

kitchen, one food bank, and one youth program centre. Two youth participants brought in their relatives to participate. I interviewed 23 youth in total, with 17 youth being known to me from past experience and six who were new. The demographic information of these youth including age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation are provided in Appendix C.

Participants were chosen based on two parameters.
1) They had to be between the ages of 18 and 30 inclusive; this was to ensure they were old enough to not require parental consent to agree to participate, and within the age range many organizations classify as 'youth' in terms of funding their programs.

2) They had to have accessed a food support program or service in their lifetime, so that all participants had their own experiences to share around food access through such organizations; this was to gain insight from not only youth who fully or partially rely on food support, but to also gain the perspective of youth who have stopped using these services and to understand their reasoning.

This research was not done in collaboration with any food support organization in particular; however, a majority of the youth interviewed had been involved with one local non-profit centered around education and employment. All the participants had been involved with at least one organization that staff participants (see Section 4.3) were recruited from. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were held one-on-one except two cases, where two participants were partners, and another participant had brought their partner who did not participate. All meetings were held in outdoor locations, which introduced the first limitation - weather. Late October and early November saw some flurries and low temperatures in Thunder Bay, which prevented longer conversations and limited persistence on my part to discuss topics participants needed persuasion with. It also prevented the addition of interactive components to the interview. In fact, many participants chose to take their food home rather than eat during the meeting as was initially planned. However, each interview with the participants lasted half an hour to an hour, and it was ensured that we discussed each topic of interest in some detail. Transcripts of the conversations were sent to the youth participants, and they were asked to reach out with any changes or withdrawals. None of the participants reached out with amendments.

The interviews were divided into five areas of focus, each designed to explore the various aspects of food security in the lives of the youth. These are also designed to flow into each other to create an overall picture of the food situations participants face, which eventually leads to an understanding of what kinds of support youth would prefer to receive. These five areas are as follows:

1) Understanding of household and food situations of Thunder Bay Youth: the barriers youth face that contribute to food security.
2) Understanding of food preferences of youth: the kind of food do youth like eating, and how it is different from what they can access. This also includes the preference for cultural, traditional and childhood foods.

3) Barriers to eating enough and eating preferred foods: how youth feel about accessing food services available to them, specifically primary and secondary supports.
4) Understanding of food skills and interest in learning food skills: the barriers that youth face around cooking and eating their preferred foods.
5) Understanding the support youth need: what youth feel they need to help them improve their food situations. This includes their opinions about existing supports, and what they would like to see more of.

A copy of the interview questionnaire is provided in Appendix D. It is to be noted that the questions do not appear in the categories or the order outlined above. The questionnaire was created to generate an informal conversation, and the data was later sorted into desired categories. Due to the semi-structured manner of these interviews, not all of the questions were addressed for every participant, and some new questions were added for certain youth based on the conversation. The youth participants were reminded that they were able to retract any material or withdraw from the interview completely if they changed their mind; however, none of the participants expressed an interest in making any changes and all the data collected was therefore utilized in the analysis of this study.

4.4 Staff Participant Recruitment and Research Methods

A second set of interviews was conducted with staff members from various organizations who make decisions on how food related programs and services are provided to youth. Many of these organizations are charitable non-profits, while some are government funded and operated. The consistent theme between these food support organizations is to help community members achieve food security through short and long-term support. It goes without saying that these organizations operate on a basis of understanding the needs of their patrons, and finding ways to support them in ways that most benefit them. Therefore, it was deemed important to gather the perspective of those who are in this role, to gain an understanding of how these needs assessments are made, and how they are ensuring their programs and services are consistent with community needs.

Participant recruitment took place mainly through personal connections. Having worked in Thunder Bay for some time in the areas of youth, food, and life skills, I have had the opportunity to work with various community organizations and build relationships with staff members. I also sought the help of my personal and professional network to connect me with staff members from organizations I did not have a connection with. Lastly, I sent some cold emails in the hopes of recruiting some staff from organizations outside of my network. Participants were provided with a gift item as an incentive, which was granola made by youth who were employed at a local non-profit, and in some cases, cider made from local apples at the same organization.

A total of 14 participants agreed to an interview. There were two organizations which had multiple staff members participating, one had five and the other had two. The

interviews were not anonymous since they happened in person, but the names of participants and their associated organizations were kept confidential. It was deemed sufficient for the purpose of this research to only include an overview of the organization and the programs and services they offer. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, these interviews took place either outside or over video call, and were audio recorded. Staff participants were given the option to withdraw or retract any information they did not feel comfortable with. After the transcripts were created and sent to respective recipients, none of the participants wished to make any changes, and all data collected was used in the analysis.

Similar to the youth, an Informal semi-structured interview approach was used with staff participants. However, the conversation had a focus on the participants' professional experiences rather than personal, and therefore could be more structured and precise than the youth interviews. Another difference was in the degree of variation between each interview; since each organization was performing different roles in the Thunder Bay community food scene, and since participants were playing different roles within organizations, focus areas for conversations were not consistent. Some of the participants were higher level Directors and the interview focused on funding and staffing, while other staff were ground level leaders who spoke more to participant engagement.

A set of predetermined questions was developed which allowed for a guided approach to these interviews. These questions are provided in Appendix E. The data collected was categorized into four areas of focus, each to understand the model of operation and strategies to provide the optimal level of support. Each interview with staff participants lasted around one hour, and touched on each of the following topics:

1) Needs assessment: how organizations select their target demographics, and design their programs and services based on the most pressing needs
2) Scope of the organization: barriers organizations have observed which are beyond their capacity to support, and those that need further attention
3) Cultural support: involvement of organizations with cultural programs/services and their capacity to provide such support
4) Challenges: what supports organizations themselves need in order to appropriately support the community

Similar to the youth interviews, the questions for staff participants were not put into categories during the interview, but were organized after the data was collected. These interviews took place simultaneously with youth interviews within the same time period (October-November 2021). This provided me with a unique opportunity to create a bridge between the two sets of interviews, by asking staff participants questions around those topics the youth had expressed concerns with. The flexibility offered by the semi-structured interview approach allowed me to explore certain topics in more depth with staff representing relevant organizations.

4.5 Data Analysis

As mentioned before, raw data was collected as audio recordings, which were then converted into transcripts. The accuracy of these transcripts was low, largely attributed to fast, informal speech and in some cases, because of an accent. After the transcripts were generated, I listened to each recording from beginning to end and edited the text to get the most accurate information possible, before analyzing them using phenomenological analysis, supported by Otter.ai.

Inductive reasoning is when no firm hypothesis is created at the beginning of a study, and instead, the data collected is analyzed to create a conclusive understanding of the problem (Thorne, 2000). This fits well with the purpose of my research study, which is an exploratory approach trying to answer a research question rather than prove a hypothesis. Another approach that seems to fit with the intention of this research, which also applies inductive reasoning, is known as Phenomenological Analysis, described as an approach "that seeks to study the lived human experiences and the way things are perceived and appear to the consciousness" (Tuffour, 2017, p. 2). This approach is applied to data collected through personal interviews, and through individualized examination of experiences, it can not only identify various patterns that emerge, but also provide an understanding of "the underlying structure or essence of that experience" (Thorne, 2000, p. 69).

In the process of this data analysis, the transcripts were read four times each to generate individualized, experiential information from each participant interview. The first reading took place as each interview was transcribed, to edit the documents and clean the contents. The second reading generated the first list of themes, starting with the first interview in each set (youth and staff participants), to create various theme clusters. This was repeated for each interview to identify similar themes, which were placed into those clusters. The third reading was intended to pick out any important points that were missed, and during this reading the categories were refined. This led to the emergence of five areas of focus for youth participants, and four areas for staff participants. The fourth and final reading took place when these categories were being presented in chapters 5 and 6, to get a thorough understanding of the interpretations, and to bring out relevant quotes.

A phenomenological analysis technique was used in the data analysis process because this approach is more individualistic, avoids cross comparisons, and goes in-depth to understand and convey the feelings experienced by youth to generate empathy among those without similar experiences (Thorne, 2000). This method is thus different from a narrative approach which would look at a higher-level understanding of the youths' lived experiences (Earthy & Cronin, 2008), or a content or discourse analysis approach which is more methodical, impersonal, and focuses on speech patterns and word choices in communication (Stemler, 2000; Thorne, 2000). Similarly, other methods in qualitative studies were also considered, but not used in this thesis, because of the intention to stay true to the uniqueness of each youth's experience. Examples include constant comparative analysis which would compare all the interviews within each set to identify

similarities and differences, and ethnographic methods which are immersive, community focused, and higher level (Thorne, 2000).

Another branch of phenomenological analysis is known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which uses a two-fold interpretation technique. Noon (2018) described it as a double hermeneutic; where not only do the participants make an attempt to explain their experiences, but the researcher also tries to understand how the participants feel in that process, thereby incorporating the researcher's capacity in understanding the participants' viewpoints in the interpretation process. IPA requires in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, and while this research did not use the full extent of the IPA approach, the different stages of conducting IPA research as presented by Smith and Osborn (2007) were used as a guideline.

With the youth participants, this approach ensured that not only barriers to their food security were discussed, but that I was also able to focus on how they felt about those barriers, and what kind of support they were willing and able to receive. For staff participants, this approach allowed me to understand how they felt about the programs they were in charge of, what barriers they faced while trying to deliver programs in a way they saw fit with their clients, and what strategies they implemented trying to work around obstacles. Overall, this research was conducted at a very personal level with an emphasis on participants' thoughts and feelings about the issue of food security, and this method of analysis appears to be a great fit. Noon (2018, p. 80) stated that the IPA approach has the capacity to utilize "subjective experience as scientific data" and can be particularly useful for research that highlights experiences, provides meaning to those experiences, and examines how those meanings shape a person's individuality and role in society.

According to the method detailed in Smith and Osborn (2007), the first interview in each set was analyzed following the idiographic approach, and themes were generated based on details found within the transcript. IPA is a technique that employs a combination of the theories of phenomenology (not just experiences but an interpretation of the meanings of those experiences), double hermeneutics ("the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (p. 75)) and ideography (a strong focus on the individualistic and unique nature of each interview, story and experience) (Noon, 2018). While these concepts were not followed to their full extent for this research to be considered IPA, they were kept in mind in order to create a thorough interpretation of the research data.

The remaining interviews were analyzed on a case-by-case basis and themes were identified based on those in the first interview. Naturally, some transcripts introduced new themes, while some transcripts did not cover all the themes. These themes were then clustered into five different categories for the youth interviews, and four different categories for the staff interviews. These categories are discussed in greater detail in the results and interpretation section, which bring forth the findings of this research.

4.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The problem of survival bias was introduced in Chapter 2, and I have observed that my research may have also included this bias to some extent. All the youth participants recruited had been involved with at least one food support organization, which means none of them had barriers so severe that they were unable to attend at all. However, I have included participants who had used food support in the past and no longer do, which does bring to light certain barriers youth face with access. I acknowledge it was difficult to recruit participants who were not involved with organizations with which I had contacts. For future research, examining the needs of youth who are not connected with any form of support at all, innovative strategies need to be designed to create outreach and generate interest in participation.

This study has used the age range of 18-30 in participant recruitment, the reason being that this range is used in the definition of youth used by many of the food support organizations in Thunder Bay. However, I have also chosen this age range because youth generally leave care and start living independently at this age, and the skills they learn in early adulthood around decision making abilities, choices, and resourcefulness eventually determine the lifestyles they adapt in later years. My research has identified that older youth often learn from the struggles they overcome in their 20s, leading to them becoming more resourceful and proactive in meeting their needs. An alternative strategy to my research would have been to break down the age range, and to study two different age groups within this 18-30 range, in order to comparatively understand how lived experience impacts resourcefulness, and thus attainment of food security. However, this was not attempted within the limited scope of this paper, and a further analytical study, using the data obtained from this research, may shed light on this perspective.

My research has identified barriers that youth face in a number of areas, as presented in chapter 5. However, it can be noted that almost all of these barriers, namely income, housing, knowledge of resources, financial and food literacy skills, mental health, and external barriers such as transport, weather, communication, and employment, can also impact the adult age group. In fact, these barriers manifest in the lives of youth soon after they leave the care of parents or guardians, and unless they develop the skills to manage their needs, this remains a challenge into adulthood, impacting not only their own lives but the lives of their dependants as well. While my research has highlighted the importance of addressing and acknowledging these barriers in the youth demographic, it should be considered that adult demographics may also be experiencing similar barriers to food access, and skill development programs targeting adults could be a further area of research.

Data collection for this research was completed within a short span of time, starting on October 10th, 2021, and ending on November 17th, 2021. Although the total number of participants was sufficient to draw conclusions in this type of work (23 Youth and 14 Staff), more participants were not interviewed due to the weather turning cold and the restriction to conduct all interviews outdoors. An additional drawback of the cold

weather was that although I tried to keep the interviews to around 30-minutes to one hour, in some cases youth participants were not dressed for the weather, and there was a sense of discomfort with sitting and talking for a prolonged period; this often led me to finish the interview without getting too deep into topics. That is not to say enough information was not gathered, but there could have been more.

Similarly with staff participants, there were some organizations which did not respond to my initial email. If it had not been for the weather limiting my timeline, and COVID-19 preventing staff from being at their offices, I could have made follow-up efforts to call or visit in person to get more interviews. Another limitation that was prominent across all organizations was the change in program and service delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regular programming was mostly canceled in organizations that provided in-person and group support, and food banks and soup kitchens operated in a modified format. Due to this transition, the information gathered often focused on COVID-19 programming, and in most cases provided two sets of data around program design and delivery. Effort has been made in this thesis to focus on the pre-COVID-19 programming model for these organizations, which is expected to be more relevant to providing food related support in the post-pandemic world. Another limitation that came in combination with this was the staff turnover. Some of the staff participants I had spoken to had only joined the organization in the last two to three years, and had limited knowledge around pre-COVID-19 operations. Unfortunately, in these cases, a secondary participant was not available to interview.

It should be noted that there were several areas of strength with this data collection process. Perhaps the most notable was my introduction to the Emergency Food Response monthly meetings where I learned about the various organizations working together to distribute emergency food to community members. This allowed a better understanding of community efforts, as well as introduced me to existing organizations in the community who generally do this kind of work. I was also able to use my connections within this community to request staff participant interviews. Staff members were more open to discussing their work with me due to prior relationships, or because of being introduced through a mutual contact person. A similar pattern was observed with youth participants, who were more willing to speak with me because of the trust and connection that already existed with a majority of them. For the youth participants, a big draw was the incentive of a meal from any restaurant in Thunder Bay. Having the funds for this study provided by my thesis Supervisor allowed me to make this interview interesting, build greater rapport through discussing what we should eat, and generate trust by going out of my way to find the foods they liked.

When it comes to data analysis, a limitation was a lack of a second perspective. I have come across some papers in my research that utilized one or two additional reviewers to go over the transcribed data and help with coding, for example Brijnath, Gahan, Gaffy, and Dow (2020) and Martens (2015). Due to the confidential nature of this research, and the trust with especially the youth participants who were assured that no one else will see their interviews, I was the only person involved in the process. However, this type of data analysis coming from a single researcher is not uncommon in

thesis level research. Similar approaches have been observed in Globensky (2021), Hill (2021), Guthrie (2020), and Haase (2020), which are all master's level theses.

While my research used a semi-structured questionnaire to gather data during participant interviews, the data analysis generated themes that were categorized to provide an understanding of the food situations in the youths' lives, and the food support approaches implemented by organizations. This method is presented in Chapter 4.5. The categories for youth included five areas of focus, namely: barriers to food security, food preferences, barriers to preferred food, food skills, and supports needed. As can be observed, these categories focus on the bare minimum requirements of food security, which is to have sufficient food, and food that youth like to eat. I have not included a focus on nutrition in this research because of my intention to highlight the gaps in food support that prevent youth form meeting their basic hunger requirements. Nutritious food is another factor that plays into food security, and it was found in my study that when youth spoke about preferred food, many expressed a preference for balanced, home-made meals. An aspect of food skills and food literacy programs can be to provide skills around tasty, nutritious meals, which has been highlighted as a recommendation in this thesis. There is further scope to expand on this work to include organizational efforts focused on nutrition in food support, and to understand the steps that are being taken at the organizational level to promote healthy eating.

Data analysis also generated four areas of interest with staff interviews, namely needs assessment, scope of the organizations, cultural programming and supports needed. These areas were focused on to understand the current level of supports provided by the organizations, and how they fit with the needs of the youth. This not only allowed me to understand how there were gaps between existing services and the ease of access for youth, but also allowed me to identify areas where organizations were unable to provide appropriate support due to resource limitations. Especially with cultural programming, it was found that limitations are not only financial, but also knowledge based when it comes to non-Indigenous organizations. This allowed for recommendations around inter-agency collaboration to combine resources, in order to implement cultural programs.

A major theme of this research is to bring out the voices of the youth who access services, and it was important to include as many voices as possible to demonstrate the diverse nature of the needs of youth despite them coming from similar age groups and sharing similar problems. Similarly, a diverse dataset for the staff was necessary, because although many of these organizations work with similar goals and similar demographics, the level of service provided is not consistent and these internal barriers needed to be highlighted; not only between different organizations, but also within different roles that determine the latitude of staff members. This showed that although overarching themes around challenges may be very similar between different youth accessing support, or various organizations providing support, at a concentrated level these problems are unique and require individualistic solutions.

Chapter 5: Perspectives of the Youth

Chapters 5 and 6 present the results and interpretation of this thesis. Chapter 5 focuses on youth interviews, and chapter 6 discusses the findings from staff interviews. Quotations have been used where necessary to provide the full understanding of the sentiment being shared.

5.1 Understanding of household and food situations of Thunder Bay youth: What are the barriers youth face that contribute to food insecurity

Participants were asked questions to create a baseline understanding of their household food situations. In the following two sections, I first examine the patterns and habits that youth demonstrate around obtaining their food, and then delve into the various factors that impact and shape these patterns. These sections help to create a picture of the participants' household food situations.

5.1.1 Patterns of Food Acquisition Among Youth

Two of the major sources of food for people in the Thunder Bay community, as per the Emergency Food Response report (CEFRP, 2021), are chain grocery stores and food supports. Both these sources were discussed with youth.

A total of four participants mentioned that they had an irregular pattern of food purchase, meaning they either seldom bought food, or that their purchase was need-based. All four of these participants were at the time of the interview not in permanent housing, which might explain this behaviour. Participants 13 and 19 were staying at a shelter which provided meals and no space to cook. Participant 11 did not have access to a house or a kitchen, and said that other than at soup kitchens, the only time they ate was when someone else bought them food. All three of these participants did not have an income, and primarily relied on food support. Participant 18 was sharing accommodation with a friend, and bought food quite frequently in small amounts; this was the only person who had an income and they used it to buy mostly snacks and non-perishable food. This participant also preferred not to go to soup kitchens, largely because of the distance, and because they were not willing to spend their money on bus fare. In fact, a pattern has emerged among youth with even a small amount of income to avoid charitable food support, as will be seen when I discuss the youth who live independently. Participants 15 and 16 did not specify their food purchase patterns; they were in semi-stable housing with no income, and mostly relied on their support worker to bring them food. They also preferred not to go to soup kitchens or food banks, although it was evident that they had a need.

All of the remaining 17 participants said they either bought all of their food, or bought some and used food support programs as a back-up. Participants 1 through 4, who had recently moved out and lived independently, purchased groceries between one and three times a month and ate fast food approximately 8, 16, 12 and 15 times a month respectively. Participant 2 (age 19) provided justification for this stating that eating at

home vs eating out balances out in terms of money: "*I have saved money even with a lot of takeout and not cooking at home*." Participant 4, who has a young child, mentioned that even though it is more expensive to buy fast food, it is something that fits better with their life: "*I eat a whole lot more like fast food and like things that aren't as healthy. I tried to feed him (child) healthier things.*" These four participants also said that they did not rely on any community-based food support services, but sometimes accessed food from friends, family, and workplace and the annual Christmas Cheer food hampers.

On the other hand, Participants 6, 9, 12, 14, 17, and 20 mentioned going grocery shopping between one and three times a month and rarely buying fast food, except Participant 6 who bought lunch while at work. Interestingly, these participants all lived with their families, lived on shared income, and had at least one person at their homes who would cook. Nearly all of these participants mentioned having used direct food support in the past, and currently using them as a back-up if necessary. Three participants mentioned using secondary support for food through their connection with local youth programs. Two participants who are Indigenous also mentioned food access though relatives who hunt and supply them with wild meats.

Two of the participants said they or their families went grocery shopping once a week. These were the only two participants in the sample who were part of a two-adult household with young children. Participant 23 (age 30) has biweekly income from a full-time job, and mostly shops at grocery stores. Participant 10 (age 27) does not have consistent income and heavily relies on soup kitchens and food banks for supplies, and smaller purchases at grocery stores. The latter participant has been living alone since they were 16, and has developed several strategies to stretch their money, such as shopping for off-brand canned food, looking for sales and price matching, and connecting with local organizations to seek out support. Both of these participants discussed prioritizing healthy meals for their children, ensuring they were cooked at home, and included portions of vegetables. Both these families had one adult who was highly skilled in food preparation. They also ensured a constant pattern of food availability at their homes.

Participants 5, 7, 8, 20, 21 and 22 mentioned that they purchase food from grocery and convenience stores at least twice every week. These were households with consistent and reliable income, and were able to make bulk grocery purchases as well as frequent purchases of perishables. All of them have used food support in the past including soup kitchens, food banks and school breakfast/lunch programs. One participant said they still use them as a back-up if needed. However, staying consistent with the pattern of youth preferring to buy their own food, Participant 7 (age 19) said that they preferred an affordable food market in their neighbourhood run by a local organization. Only Participants 21 and 22 in this group have a high intake of fast food because of their job in the food service industry, where they eat their meals at a discounted price.

The above data indicates that income is an important element of food access, with more grocery purchases and less visits to food support organizations, but in reality, it is found

to be more complicated. Youth who have no income are sometimes hesitant to access food support programs because of a number of barriers, and some youth who have a substantial income sometimes prefer ready-made food as opposed to grocery stores. Youth with large households may need to supplement their grocery store purchases with food support, and more access to these services happen among participants who have more lived experience with food insecurity. In fact, it was observed that the older the youth was, they were generally more resourceful around feeding themselves and their families. Youth who have at least one person in their household with skills to cook prefer grocery stores and food banks, while youth with limited food skills or cooking facilities, regardless of income status, prefer ready-to-eat items from fast food or convenience stores.

An interesting observation to be made here is that younger youth, specifically teenagers who have used direct food support as a part of their childhood are less interested in using them now, even when their food situation is vulnerable. Youth who now have employment, but are unable to cook at home, visit grocery stores less frequently and buy more fast food. Those that have not become financially independent have low frequency of food purchases, and choose to use direct food support as a last resort, often preferring secondary support through a worker. It will be important to understand what aspects of their previous experience with food support programs have deterred them from continued usage in their teen years.

Among those participants who have the power to purchase, it can be seen that youth who live alone have a higher tendency to buy and eat fast food. One reason for this could be the division of labour in the household - those who lived alone were responsible for all aspects of their lives including income, groceries, budgeting, cooking, and cleaning, whereas those who lived with their family had more people undertaking different tasks, and 'tiredness and lack of motivation' around cooking did not appear to be a barrier for them. Because of the size of the household, the total amount of money allocated to each person may be lower than the youth living alone, and this could be another reason for a greater focus on eating at home as opposed to expensive takeout. This could also contribute to these families considering accessing food resources as a secondary option. When it comes to feeding a family as opposed to feeding oneself, it somehow becomes easier to cope with the psychological difficulties of receiving direct food support. As Participant 10 (age 27) puts it, "*Well, I was 16. When I had my daughter. So, I had to like, take care of us. So yeah, so I just had to overcome it. It took me a little while. Yeah, but until she started eating when, when she was on formula and baby food. It was okay for me to like, be insecure and stuff. But like after that, I was like, okay, we need to eat.*"

Participants who had frequent grocery store visits demonstrate either financial freedom or strong financial literacy that allows them to spread out their spending based on need. In addition, these participants also mentioned that having lived in a low-income environment, their families have learned various strategies to budget their money. Participant 8 (age 20) describes: "*When we grew up, we grew up very poor. So, like, she (mom), we did a whole lot of scrounging especially when I was younger before I*

had a job... So yeah, she knows how to. She used to make these spring cleaning casseroles just every so often, you know, like… just take everything in the cupboard except for the kitchen sink and throw it into a pot." This speaks to the high level of food skills that comes not from organizational learning, but from lived experience.

It can be seen that eating habits, though highly dependent on money, are also impacted by a number of other factors such as money management skills, cooking skills, time and energy, support within the household, resourcefulness of the participant, and an interest in eating a certain kind of diet. Participants further elaborated on some of the most prominent barriers they have faced around food acquisition, explored in the next section.

5.1.2 Factors that Impact Food Acquisition

5.1.2.1 Income

Income has been established as a large factor that contributes to food security. Among the youth interviewed, 19 had some source of income. Six received government support (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Ontario Child Benefit), nine received income from employment, and four received both. There were four participants who did not have any income. Thirteen participants said they were sharing finances with others in their household, while two said their income was solely for themselves. Four participants did not discuss the distribution of their earnings.

Participants were asked about financial barriers to food access. Nine participants said money was currently not a barrier; however, some mentioned other barriers that did impact their food access such as cooking skills, interest/motivation, time, and energy. Seven participants, all unemployed, said money was a barrier, despite two of them receiving some money from government support. The remaining participants chose not to answer.

It can be noted that some families that did have income, from either one or multiple sources, still faced a financial barrier to food security. This can be attributed to the varied needs around their limited income, and having to make decisions that often prioritize other expenses over food. Interestingly, rent was not mentioned as a competing barrier to food. This could be because in many subsidized housing situations where the individual is also on welfare, they receive their money after rent is deducted, and it is not a visible cost. Many households also consider rent to be their primary expense, and the remaining expenses end up competing with food.

One of the participants pointed out that even if their government cheques were able to cover groceries, transport costs were high and created a barrier to shopping. Participant 14 (age 21) said: *"if I were to taxi to Walmart, it's like 30-40 bucks. Just one way. So, like, one way just to go shopping and be like, 80 bucks. And I can't afford that. You could get a lot for 80 bucks."* While it can be argued that public transit is an option, it is not feasible for everyone, due to bus fare, wait times, and psychological difficulties such as anxiety and mental health challenges.

From the nine participants who said money was not a barrier, five participants said they had previously experienced financial struggles with food. All of them have recently come into more stable income through full time or part time work. In addition, those who did not find money to be a barrier had themselves or someone in their household who possessed sufficient skills in financial literacy around budgeting, saving, and money management. It can therefore be stated that we do find income to have a significant barrier to food security, often accompanied by the skill to manage said income.

The reasons for youth not being in employment can be varied, and can stem both from internal and external barriers. Skills around job search, interviews, workplace etiquette, and work ethic are things that can be taught through programs and workshops, whereas challenges such as unreliable transportation, lack of availability due to school, mental health or addiction hindering work performance are more individualized and require specific and sometimes longer-term support. Three of the participants mentioned not being able to find adequate childcare to also be a barrier to their employment.

When asked about future potential barriers that youth would be concerned about, one participant mentioned keeping their job in relation to money, and three people mentioned money specifically as a barrier to food security. The general sentiment among participants was that if there was enough money, all the other barriers could eventually be overcome.

5.1.2.2 Housing

Sixteen participants were in stable housing at the time of the interview. Four participants were in semi-stable housing, staying with friends and family until they found their own place. Three participants were in unstable housing situations, two staying at a shelter and one at various hotels and sometimes on the street.

Participants were asked if having a place to live and having access to cooking facilities impacted their food habits. Nearly everyone said having a kitchen allowed them to cook and eat food rather than relying on external sources. Those participants have recently found access to their own kitchen were more appreciative of the facilities, speaking of being able to *"freely eat what I want. Cook what I want when I want"* and *"it just didn't feel right eating the food cause I didn't pay for it... but now it's my food and it's my own place and its mine... have everything of my own it's like, okay*."

Interestingly, for those who have had a stable kitchen and housing for at least the last few years, the novelty of having this freedom gradually gets replaced with inadequacies within the kitchen, especially in government subsidized housing. Four participants said counter and storage space is minimal at their household, and another mentioned they are unable to use the stove in the summer because the house gets incredibly hot with no air-conditioning. Two participants mentioned having to be extremely careful in the kitchen because if anything breaks, they will not have the funds for a replacement. Those with stable kitchens also pointed out reasons why they may not be using them. Participant 4 (age 21) said they were forced to move into government housing after

losing their previous house, and the housing cost for a mother and child is higher than she was previously paying, leading to budget cuts when it came to food. Participant 6 (age 19) said "*We've always had like a kitchen. But like, it was just like the food thing,*" referring to not being able to afford groceries.

For those with unstable housing, the two participants who lived at the shelter had their three meals a day taken care of, but they did not have access to preparing their own food. Participant 11 (age 21) said they could sometimes cook at their girlfriend's house but mostly relied on food programs in the city. Youth with unstable and semi-stable housing also mentioned that they could potentially store some food at a friend's place, at the risk of the food being taken by someone else when they were not there.

Housing is one of the factors that directly impact food security, and appears to generate positive feelings around self-reliance when cooking and eating foods they prefer. When speaking of food sovereignty, having access to a space with amenities, utensils, and appliances to prepare, cook, and store food provides a certain level of choice, ownership, and involvement with food, that take-out meals from soup kitchens cannot offer. Those with access to housing are therefore better equipped to obtain food from food banks and prepare their meals at home. This came up with those participants in unstable or semi-stable housing, when they were asked about their food preferences. Participant 18 (age 18) spoke of feeling undeserving of the food that belonged to the host family, and not being able to cook and eat what they liked in someone else's space. It appears that housing and having a place to prepare food does help with having some ownership over one's food habits, and participants are making it clear that food security is not an isolated problem, rather it is a combination of several other factors interacting with each other.

5.1.2.3 Knowledge of and Access to Resources

Five people mentioned knowledge and access to resources as a barrier in their life, eventually leading to a decline in food security. Participant 15 (age 19) who has recently found the need to rely on food support, identified the need for more widespread information and awareness: "*there's things that I probably never even had known until I had talked to people like [support workers]. Because [with] my parents, it was always, I feed you, I take care of you* [Referring to education around resources]. *Even if it was just like, you know, like, in elementary schools, when police officers around Halloween would go and give an assembly to the kids about how to be careful on Halloween, yeah, even if it was just something like that….*" This participant goes on to connect this education with the stigma around receiving food, from their personal experience: *"with that being kids, they can grow up knowing that like, you know what, hey that's an actual problem, that maybe that they won't be bullying other people when they go themselves. If it's taught as a lesson. That it's a need. And it's a, it's something like that, like an actual, like history lesson. And they're not gonna throw it down like it's shame.*"

This participant pointed out an important issue with food access, which is shame and stigma. This may be one reason why younger youth are often hesitant to seek direct food support, which they eventually grow out of at a later age. Youths' perceptions

around self-image develop at a young age and are shaped by the voices around them, and young people may often want to protect that self-image at the cost of going hungry. On the other side of this, youth from solvent families may not understand this need that some youth may have, and may unwittingly intensify this stigma. While initiatives like the Dignified Food Access campaign take place throughout the city to inform staff and volunteers at food support organizations around respect, dignity, and non-judgement, that same level of awareness should be created among the general public around the need for food security for people from all walks of life. Education around and exposure to food resources in school settings could be a promising method to de-stigmatize food access starting at a young age.

One participant discussed that even though information does exist on where to find support, they would usually only be able to access this information by physically attending a food support site in the first place. Many resources seem to be centred around certain neighbourhoods, which prevents people living in other areas from having access. Participant 14 (age 21) talked about previously being a regular at a local soup kitchen, but after moving, their family is not within walkable range of any food support places or grocery stores, and anxiety around taking the bus makes it extremely difficult to acquire food.

Even with the knowledge of a resource and means to get there, there are further barriers an individual has to face when attempting to receive support. Participant 15 (age 19) mentioned their difficulty in obtaining a health card for their child, as they did not have the necessary documentation. Without identification documents, they are also not able to register at the Food Bank or claim Child Benefit. On this note, Participant 21 (age 18) expressed their displeasure: "*I understand that they do need a type of ID. But if it's a teen who's on their own or like if they don't have a health card with a picture or something, but they need food, they should just [give it]. I know this is just a dumb teenager way of putting it. And there are logistics that need to happen, so they know who gets food and who doesn't. But like, I've witnessed firsthand some people who need food get told no.*"

These barriers are important to talk about because even though organizations have the direct food support resources in place, the expectation to successfully be able to access these resources lies with the recipient. There are some organizations who provide secondary support and help youth with these barriers, such as one-on-one support, bus tickets, identification document clinics, funding for obtaining certain documents, and so forth. However, there is still an added layer of activities for youth to have to seek out and access these secondary supports before they can access the food that they may immediately need. When it comes to accessing these supports, sometimes there may not be severe logistical barriers, but may be personal barriers that make the process difficult for youth. This may stem from discomfort around accessing these services, lack of motivation to take initiative, or not having a trusted contact who could guide them through the process. This indicates a need for further action from organizations to not only provide support, but facilitate the process of access as well.

5.1.2.4 Skills and Education around Budgeting, Shopping, and Cooking

It has been observed that some youth, even when they have the means to buy the groceries and ingredients that they need, may rely on quick meals or takeout for their daily dietary needs. While money and access to a kitchen are not a barrier for these youth to eat well, the barrier comes from a lack of food skills.

Three participants mentioned food literacy skills which would allow them to make healthier and more balanced meals on a budget. Some of the barriers around cooking at home as mentioned by participants include buying too much and portions of perishable food going to waste, not being able to find food that everyone in the household likes, and not having the skills to plan meals for the entire week to take pressure off after work. Skills around these things might make the process of cooking seem less daunting, and encourage youth to get more involved in their food. Participant 23 (age 30) mentioned the necessity of food skills that would allow them to continue their positive food habits in the long run: "*how do I make what would create a healthy diet? Like that's not just one meal that is also like breakfast, lunch, dinner. They're not just one day, but like, going forward*?"

Some of the organizations interviewed in this study provide such skills to youth who participated in their program, and those who have attended those programs found them to be beneficial. Some of the youth who have found jobs in the food service industry have also picked up skills on the job which they have applied to their personal eating habits. It should be noted though, that these programs run at small capacities, and only a handful of youth have the opportunity to access them. Schools may be one of the places where these skills are taught to a larger group of youth, which is generally done through foods classes. It should be noted that not all youth have an interest in cooking, and lack of awareness about the benefits of eating at home, combined with other priorities that need their attention, may discourage youth from trying.

Participant 18 (age 18) said that their dinners consisted of chips and snacks on days when they could not manage full meals, and if they had known how expensive dental care was, they would have taken better care of themselves. Participant 2 (age 19) mentioned that having planned meals or having meals that only took 15 minutes to make would help. They considered a service like Hello Fresh, with pre-portioned ingredients that would not only help them waste less food, but would also allow them to eat healthy. Participant 4 (age 21), who is a single mother, said: "*it's just a lot of work… It's like in between watching* [child] *I have to be like watching my food too… And I don't normally have like the things to make an actual like full meal… If it was easier to do, then I would be doing it.*"

These types of food skills, having an interest and motivation to process food, and lived experiences that allow people how to naturally work with food, are internal barriers that many youth have. An organization or support person may not be able to assist with such difficulties overnight, but these skills will require sustained education and skill-development from organizations as well as personal efforts on the part of the youth to learn.

5.1.2.5 Mental Health

Although mental health was not considered in the original questionnaire, at least three youth mentioned this to be a factor in their eating habits. Participant 23 (age 30) summarizes the sentiment well: "*I mean, I think that the two coincide very much so because I mean, when your mental health isn't in a good state, you don't care about yourself. You don't care about eating well, you don't care about showering, like, you are basically just existing as you are and you don't care what happens. Like you don't have a vision towards like, oh, I should eat today because I'm gonna feel like garbage tomorrow. You don't. You don't have that foresight to like, even think about it.*" Participant 22 (age18), when asked about what their biggest barrier to food was, said: "*mostly depression, if I'm gonna be real to you? Like probably 80% depression,*" followed by: "*but I mean I could probably cook like something up like if I really needed to, I don't want to f*cking die. But like it's weird it's a mixed bag also eating and like anxiety too can't eat when I'm really anxious. So that's hard*."

Mental health may as well be one of the biggest barriers to food security that often gets overlooked by primary and secondary support organizations when trying to provide food support. A large number of emotional and psychological barriers youth face around accessing food, or accessing those subsidiary components that allow them to access food, stem from mental health. Examples include not wanting to cook, not feeling confident asking for support, feelings of anxiety around taking the bus or going to a food bank or soup kitchen, lack of motivation to take initiative around self-care, and not finding the energy to fill out forms to gather the documentation needed. All of these examples could all eventually contribute to a life where the correct series of things do not happen to lead to a secure livelihood. While the types of support currently offered are clearly important and have helped many youth get the things they need, additional support may be needed for the other group of youth who cannot even access those services, or do not succeed when they do access them.

5.1.2.6 Additional Barriers

The barriers discussed above are some of the major barriers that came up in conversations with youth. However, there are secondary barriers that often impact the youths' means of food acquisition. Four such barriers have been identified, namely weather, means of communication, transportation, and association with school or work.

<u>Weather</u>

Thunder Bay has long winters and snow can be found on the ground from approximately November to April. Summer months see high temperatures as well as rainfall. Participants were asked how food acquisition and transportation to and from locations are impacted by the seasons. Participants who owned a vehicle or had access to one, said that they found it easier to access food despite finding driving difficult in the snow. One participant mentioned having reliable transport has been important in their food access, not only because of safety and efficiency, but it also allowed them to go to the food banks in time and carry all the food home.

Those who relied on walking or transit sometimes tried to find alternatives to taking the bus (reasons discussed in the transportation section), such as asking for rides, ordering takeout, ordering grocery delivery, and so forth. However, they also pointed out problems with food delivery, mainly the higher cost, which takes away from their food budget. Some youth still preferred to walk, but that was limited to those who lived in close proximity to grocery stores. Some participants opt out of obtaining food at all and choose to go hungry, or those skilled in creative cooking make do with what they have in the cupboards. Participant 11 (age 21) who relies heavily on soup kitchens and waits outside in line for meal service discussed the difficulty of unpredictable weather to food access.

Participant 6 (age 19) discussed the winter season itself could be a reason for a lack of motivation to look after themselves: "*winter is like, I don't know, I just like, I'm so like cold. There's always so like, sad. And so like, I don't want to like cook all that much*." Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a known phenomenon that impacts countries with reduced sunshine during winter months, and although not discussed in this research, could be something that impacts youth leading to lack of effort in their food and self-care needs.

On the other hand, some of the youth have demonstrated a capacity to be resourceful with the situations they have been put in. Participant 19 (age 30) said winter was when they accessed services more, choosing to go to the Indigenous Friendship Centre and collect bus tickets and winter gear. It has been observed that youth who have been more successful with securing their needs have been the ones who were proactive, asking for what they needed, planning around predicted lack of resources, and to some extent setting aside hesitations and discomfort for the sake of meeting basic needs. Participant 10 (age 27), who has changed their views on accessing support from being a shy teenager to becoming a young mother securing resources for her child, said "*at some point, you just have to get up and do it*."

Communication

Participants were asked how they make use of their communication devices for the purpose of food access. Communication, specifically phone and internet access can be considered a basic necessity for people at the present time, since a number of services can be known about, registered for, or even accessed through a phone. Some youth said having a means of communication did not have an impact on their food access; this was said by participants who usually purchase their foods at grocery stores, and by two participants who relied on walking around to learn about various programs and services in the city. A majority of the participants said they use their phones to order food delivery.

However, some of the participants mentioned using social media on their phones to learn about food programs around the city, and two participants specifically mentioned registering with 211 during the pandemic. Many of the participants agreed that Facebook is the best way for them to get information about food programs.

Although participants here discussed how having a phone directly impacts their food access, there are indirect impacts as well. For example, certain programs in the city have online registration that allow participants to access meal kits and cooking classes. Oftentimes participants are required to call various government offices to obtain documents. Online banking allows youth to have easy access to their money. Secondary support organizations may sometimes keep in touch with their past participants through phone or social media, and those participants who are easier to reach are easier to support. It can be said that youth who do not have access to reliable communication may be one step removed from access to resources that they need.

In addition, some of the youth had mentioned that when it came to learning new skills, they preferred to use their phones and access online material rather than go somewhere for programming. Youth having access to reliable data, or wi-fi signal, allows them the freedom to easily seek out information. Audio-visual media may be helpful when it comes to knowledge sharing around food skills, for example clips of instructional videos may be uploaded into social media platforms used by youth. This would allow youth to look up information in-the-moment, removing the need for youth to ask for help, and encouraging them to have greater control over their food habits.

Transportation

Transportation has been mentioned as a barrier by youth regarding all sources of food access, including grocery stores, fast food, food banks and soup kitchens, and access to cooking and other skill development programs.

For families getting paid once a month, one big shopping trip appears to be a popular option. However not having a car means they either have to rely on transit, or rent a taxi. Transit is a physical difficulty when a large number of items need to be transported, and may sometimes accompany risks associated with other people. Participant 10 talked about an experience they had on the city transit: "*oh, sometimes it gets scary like because sometimes, drunks are on the bus. I get scared they're gonna try and grab my groceries because at one time, this lady was hardcore looking at my like grocery, so and I knew she was trying to grab it. But good thing the bus came so I hopped on and ditched. Managed to leave.*"

Youth have also identified the cost of bus fare as a reason for not using transit, which is $3 with a transfer that is valid for one hour. For youth waiting in line at a soup kitchen, or attending programming at community organizations, there is a chance they will need to pay twice on the bus for the round trip. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the city had waived bus fares for two months, and a survey with users discovered that removing this extra expense improved the quality of life for low-income residents (West, 2022). However, Participant 8 (age 20) had not been using the bus during the pandemic, because masking protocols were not enforced.

Thunder Bay transit system also has an allegedly racism problem. A majority of transit users are Indigenous, and prejudice often comes from bus drivers making Indigenous people feel unwelcome and unsafe (Andrew-Gee, 2019). Youth participants have noted

that bus service is often 30-40 minutes apart, especially across town, and missing the bus causes disruptions in their schedules. Waiting for the bus when the weather is cold is also a challenge, and heated stations are often not helpful beyond certain low temperatures (Andrew-Gee, 2019). While large amounts of food cannot be carried on a bike, this could still be an option for youth during smaller shopping trips. But the lack of safe bike lanes, and the burden of safety lying with bikers rather than motorists, discourage many youth from using this mode of transport (Andrew-Gee, 2019). Taxi is an expensive option, and while cheaper rideshare services such as Uride and GoKasper do exist, they require a phone, data plan, and a credit card, which may be another barrier for some.

<u>Support from School or Work</u>

It was found that although school and places of employment are often not considered organizations for food support, it has become clear during the pandemic how much youth rely on school breakfast and lunch programs. Employment ensures income, hence directly leading to job security, and food service businesses also play an important role in regular food access for their employees.

All of the participants who worked in the food service industry said they relied heavily on their workplaces for discounted meals. Some participants mentioned that food skills programs and breakfast/lunch programs through school have helped them with access to food. In addition, some participants mentioned food or food tickets being available at the principal's office, which they found discreet and helpful. The Four Directions room at high schools, a space for Indigenous students to learn cultural teachings, was something Indigenous students felt comfortable accessing food from. Other ways schools helped with food access included cooking classes held within schools and alternative education centres, as well as programs that some classrooms do in collaboration with the local non-profit organization Roots to Harvest.

Many of the participants interviewed have been supported with their essential needs by organizations within the community, and some of those organizations have provided them with food-related skills, as well as continued food support. Some of these connections have happened through school and employment, and knowledge and experience gathered through these experiences have helped some youth implement these skills at home. The commitment to school and work sometimes played a role in determining youths eating habits, and an interesting observation that was made from this was that this can work both ways. Youth who worked long hours, especially those who also went to school, often had sufficient money for groceries and an adequate diet, but many of them complained of being too tired and not having enough energy to make food when they got home. In fact, dinner was a meal that was skipped by a lot of youth who worked and lived alone.

5.1.3 Summary

The barriers discussed here are by no means comprehensive of the experiences of all youth who live in Thunder Bay, but were found to be the most important for those youth

who were interviewed. The pattern that is most easily observed is that food insecurity is a combination of multiple different factors.

For example, income is important, but so are skills around financial literacy to be able to budget that income. Ownership over one's income, in the form of bank accounts, allows greater financial freedom. Knowing how to budget and stretch their money is also necessary for youth to maintain financial security. Employment is a factor that mostly dictates income. Youth need training and guidance to become employable, and those skills need to be taught at this age of transition.

Housing has a direct impact on food security. Not only is rent a competing factor, but having a functional kitchen and storage space is necessary to have the freedom and flexibility to cook at home. Certain services such as food banks and meal kits from cooking programs can only cater to individuals who have access to a kitchen. Even though nothing prevents youth from physically accessing these services, their secondary barrier prevents them from utilizing what they receive. This is a gap in service that primary support organizations do not have the capacity to support with, and needs intervention from more structured policy changes, perhaps with advocacy from secondary support organizations.

Another issue that goes hand in hand with income and housing is food skills. Without knowledge of how to prepare, cook, and store food, eating at home becomes a daunting task that youth often prefer not to undertake at all. Basic cooking skills, and feeding oneself on a budget, should be the focus of skill-development programs to move youth away from takeout and snacks, and empower them to make quick, easy, healthy meals at home that fit into their lifestyles and personal preferences.

Barriers such as knowledge of resources and having a means of reliable communication are related. Programs have been known to exist which provide youth with cell phones and data plans, but they are not long-term, and ultimately are the responsibility of the youth to maintain. Organizations that provide support should develop strategies that allow them to work around barriers of communication to reach their target demographics, possibly through increased advertisement and outreach. While mental health is a completely different branch of support, programs and services should try to identify and accommodate various needs youth have around their mental health when it comes to resource access and utilization. One such response could be partnerships with mental health support organizations, and client referrals. Similarly, although weather is an unpredictable barrier, depending on past experiences and projected weather conditions, services could be modified that allows easier access. In terms of transportation, Poverty Free Thunder Bay (PFTB) had proposed in 2020 a gradual fare-decrease program on buses, leading to complete waiver, which unfortunately has not been implemented (West, 2022). Organizations could arrange for bus passes for their members, and bus tickets could be handed out at various locations to allow people to travel.

Finally, youth who are in school or have some form of employment are likely to have connections with supportive adults, and often benefit from support when they need it. It has been observed that youth who have been more successful with securing their needs have been the ones who were proactive, and asked for what they needed. This is easier to do when they have a reliable, non-judgemental person in their lives. While it may be difficult to seek out youth who are essentially ‘off the grid’, it has to be considered that those are the youth who may be most at need and least likely to access support. Organizations should develop programs specifically for youth who have no connections with support organizations, and provide them with a platform where they can feel comfortable, and learn to become self-reliant.

5.2 Understanding of food preferences of youth: What kind of food do youth like eating, and is it different from what they can access

Once the food situations in the youths’ lives and their food acquisition habits have been established, it was then deemed important to understand whether these conditions were in line with the food preferences of the youth. As can be recalled, food security is not only about having enough to eat, but also about having enough of the right kind of food. In this section participants were asked questions to identify what exactly is the ‘right kind’ of food for them according to their backgrounds and preferences, and whether the way they access food in the city allows them to find satisfaction with what and how they are eating.

5.2.1 Regular Dietary Patterns of Youth

Among the 23 participants, 15 participants mentioned having access to a balanced meal at home, either regularly or occasionally. Two participants stayed at a local shelter and received three daily meals there, cooked by an in-house chef. Both participants had very good things to say about this facility, but it should be noted that this is only a short-term solution for emergency housing and has limited capacity for overnight stays. Nine of these participants had at least one source of regular income, and had someone in the household with skills around budgeting, shopping, and cooking. Four participants were not working or receiving sufficient government support, and they relied on food banks, soup kitchens and secondary support for groceries and pantry items.

Despite not purchasing preferred food, some youth who are reliant on support employed creative strategies that still allowed them to cook a variety of food at home. It could be said that youth who were resourceful and had some experience with planning were able to use what they could find to create balanced meals. However, while some participants ensured that they were eating enough, that could also be considered as a mere minimum when it comes to food security. Having the aspect of choice, being able to eat food that people connect with, and food that feels good, might still be considered a luxury in these situations. Participant 15 (age 19), with a young child, said they generally ensured that their child had enough to eat, and then focused on themselves. It is to be noted that in both the above situations, the youth participants were experienced with food insecurity and had developed the skills to utilize what was available to them.

The remaining eight participants formed a more diverse group; none of them regularly ate balanced meals, but the reasons for this are varied. Two participants were in unstable or semi-stable housing situations and did not have full access to a kitchen or storage. Obtaining food from a food bank was not an option for these youth, since most of the food from there needs preparation which they did not have the facilities for. Participant 11 (age 21) used a soup kitchen when they could, and often relied on their partner or friends for food. Participant 18 (age 18) stayed with friends or relatives and either only ate leftovers, or chips and in some cases, chose sleep to forget about hunger. This participant talked about the vulnerability of eating at someone else's house: "*Just the way I grow up, is like It's hard to explain, but I just don't want any other people's food… It's just like, when I'm eating it, I just have peace of mind when I bought it.*"

Participant 7 (age 19) said they have strong food skills and an interest in cooking, but their barrier to eating preferred foods was money. Their household strategies included making boxed stuffing into meals since they were filling, and buying more packaged, canned, and frozen foods that can last a long time. Speaking of their experience with canned food, they said: "*canned ravioli is very salty, sometimes it tastes like a can. But with like a fresh ravioli, you can taste like the pasta, you can taste the cheese, you can taste the sauce, while with like a canned one it just all tastes the same. It's just the same flavor in different shapes.*" Here again, while nutritional and hunger needs are being met, youth are sometimes left feeling that they have to eat food that is of a lower quality. Some of the youth interviewed, who have started making an income, remember these experiences from their childhood and refuse to buy canned food such as soups. This is because of the poor association, which impacts their willingness to eat such foods despite having resources to dress it up and having quick and easy meals after work.

Some of the participants who did have an income, either lacked skills around food preparation (Participant 1, age 19), or time and energy to make food (Participants 2, age 19 and 3, age 21). Their diets consisted of mostly takeout, which they could afford. Participant 4, who had limited income and lacked time and energy to cook because of childcare, relied on some takeout, and ready-to-eat meals from grocery stores. They chose not to attend food banks, due to childhood experiences and stereotypes associated with such places. This participant also experienced difficulties with managing their limited income, and found budgeting strategies provided by their social workers did not work for them, presenting a further barrier to managing their food situation.

This information gathered from the youth participants indicates that what and how youth eat are not only dictated by tangible factors such as income, cooking skills, cooking facilities, and choices around what they have access to, but also more abstract factors such as time, energy, motivation, creativity, as well as the willingness to receive charitable food donations. While several campaigns and initiatives exist around supporting these tangible needs, there needs to be greater focus on the abstract needs, and youth need to be empowered to learn to work around these obstacles.

5.2.2 Dietary Preferences of Youth

It was found from the above section that although a few participants were content with their food situations, more of the participants felt they had some inadequacies with what and how they were eating. In order to understand what lacked from their food habits and what the youth felt they needed in order to have satisfactory eating habits, they were asked to discuss their preferences.

All the participants were asked whether they preferred to eat more takeout or cook at home, regardless of what was more convenient for them. Eighteen of the 23 participants said they preferred to cook at home if circumstances allowed. Four participants said they liked to know what was going into their foods, two said they liked to experiment with making new recipes, and one participant said they preferred the taste of their own cooking. Two participants said they liked eating at home with their families, and Participant 18 (age 18) described how this was special to them: "*who it's coming from, like, that's a big thing for me… Like, it makes it a lot more special to me. Like if my family makes it.*" This goes on to show that whether there is a motivation to cook or not, there was a preference for home cooked food among a majority of the youth. Youth who had other members of the family to eat with, sometimes had more reason to be involved in cooking, and if not could sometimes rely on another member of the household to cook. Four participants said they preferred takeout over home cooked food, and they all said it was because of the amount of work involved in food preparation.

The youth were also asked if there was anything they wanted to change about the way they ate, and any food they missed in their diets. Ten participants said they wanted to eat healthier, for reasons such as losing weight, better health, and feeling better in their bodies. Nine of these participants mentioned wanting to eat more fruits and vegetables, one participant mentioned wanting to eat less sugar, and three participants wanted to reduce their carbohydrates intake. One participant also mentioned wanting to eat less fast food, and three participants mentioned wanting to eat more food in general, both in terms of diversity and quantity.

When asked for the kind of support they would need to make these changes to their dietary habits, most of the youth wanted to expand their food skills, wanted more knowledge on food handling, and someone to guide them on how to plan their meals. In fact, the skills these youth are looking for are basic food skills that youth sometimes learn at home. However, many of the youth interviewed in this study lacked a supportive home environment while growing up, and missed out on learning many skills that we take for granted. It has been seen from this study that the food obtained from the food banks are sometimes unfamiliar to the youth, and they may not use some of the items because they simply do not know how to turn those into a meal. It may thus be important to consider these basic skills when designing food skills programs, as well as providing instructional support at food banks where many of these youth may access food.

5.2.3 Connection to Cultural or Childhood Foods

Participants were specifically prompted to think about their backgrounds and cultures that they identify with, and discussed their cultural ties with relation to food. This was done to generate an idea of how important those foods are that youth grew up with when it comes to food security in a diverse urban environment. It was also deemed important to recognize that not every youth participant had grown up learning about and experiencing the cultures and traditions of their ethnic backgrounds. Some youth may have grown up with traditions and practices within their families or households, which may sometimes be a mix of their diverse backgrounds, or new traditions altogether specific to their situations. Therefore, while discussing cultural foods, some youth responded with childhood food habits as part of their culture, and discussed the importance of having those in their daily lives.

Strictly speaking of cultural foods, 13 participants rated it at 5 or more on a scale of 1 to 10, and expressed the desire to have access to these in their lives. Eight of these participants identified as being Indigenous, one participant was Middle Eastern, and four were White. However, only four participants mentioned still having some level of access to this kind of food; three of them were Indigenous and one participant was from the Middle East.

Despite the ingredients in Middle Eastern cuisine needing to be imported, availability and access to cultural foods was found to be more difficult for the Indigenous participants. Participant 1 (age 19) mentioned that there are no Indigenous grocery stores or restaurants to obtain cultural food from in Thunder Bay. Food such as bannock, which was by far the most coveted item discussed by the participants, can easily be made with ingredients found in the grocery stores. However, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act prohibits selling wild fish and game. There are businesses that have begun to supply traditional foods, such as Sayers Fishery at Corbeils Point on Lake Superior, and a butcher shop at Red Rock Indian Band. However, for the youth living in Thunder Bay, purchase and transport can be a barrier. Access is easier if youth have friends or relatives who hunt or fish.

Only one participant said they still hunted regularly with their family and stored enough meat to supply them year-round. Two participants said they had regular access to meats and fish sent in from relatives in the north, but also commented how the taste of the frozen meat does not feel the same. Participant 23 (age 30) explained that the traditional food they grew up with at their father's highway reserve had a modern twist to it, and they often still ate foods such as Indian tacos, bannock dogs, and bannock burgers at home.

Three participants mentioned that they did not have much access to traditional foods at all, even though they considered these foods important. Participant 10 (age 27) said the lack of access to traditional foods was discouraging their children from getting used to those foods, such as moose meat. Participant 7 (age 19) echoed this sentiment speaking of their own experience with cultural food: "*it's just because my family never*

learned how to hunt. We didn't get those teachings when we were young, because of, you know, our cultural genocide. So that is really sad… I really like eating moose meat. I honestly don't know a lot about the cultural foods my people ate because I never got the chance to learn." They also expressed an interest in learning more about the culture if they got the chance, but found that this kind of teachings were not accessible.

Participants who had found connection with their cultural foods shared strong emotions around it. Participant 17 (age 17) said: "*It's something that I miss, like almost every day. It's something that I grew up eating. And it's just like, you know, how your tongue craves or something? It's just like that. When you can't have it. And it just like bums you out.*" Participant 18 (age 18) said eating food from their own culture, knowing where it came from, and thinking of the memories associated with eating that food somehow gives it more flavour.

It can be seen from youths' responses that cultural food is something they highly value in their lives, want their children to become familiar with, and they want to learn about and access these foods. It is to be noted that none of these participants mentioned being aware of programs that teach them how to acquire traditional foods. Learning how to hunt requires support, expert guidance, and proper gear, not to mention access to land, hunting and firearms licenses, and transportation. Youth generally do not have the means or knowledge to seek these skills out on their own, and most often they learn it from a family member. In the staff interviews, it became clear that there was a lack of such initiatives outside of the school setting, and only one staff participant mentioned a moose hunt they had been a part of years ago that involved youth training.

Another group of six participants, all non-Indigenous, could not think of any traditional food that they had been introduced to, but spoke fondly of childhood foods and the significance of having that in their lives. Participant 8 (age 20) talked about the taco salad their mother made. Three participants associated spaghetti, pizza, and poutine as traditional Canadian foods they grew up eating, and mentioned that they still sought comfort in them. Two participants, who were a couple, mentioned foods made by their family members, both from European descent. Participant 15 (age 19) stated that although this is not something they can have in their diets regularly: "*it's something that I would want* [child] *to have."* This participant also said that the experience of sharing a meal with family, and not just the meal itself, is special to them.

However, it is also important to note that food from childhood or culture is not important for everyone. Some youth may not have grown up with culture, or may have had a difficult childhood, and may not associate positive food experiences with their past. Two participants did not answer the question about cultural food. Eight participants out of the 23 said cultural or childhood foods were not something they considered to have an importance in their lives, and did not express a desire to seek it out. Racial backgrounds also varied within this group: two identified as Indigenous, one identified as Indigenous and White, three identified as White, and one identified as African American and one identified as Asian American.

Participant 20 (age 18) said they had access to traditional foods such as bannock and moose meat, and had the option to go hunting with their father's side of the family, but did not have much interest in doing so. Participant 3 (age 21), who had grown up on a reserve and participated in many traditional practices, said they missed it and could have access if they asked their grandmother, but generally did not want to. Participant 21 (age 18) said the tradition around the food somehow loses value if it does not happen in a traditional environment, and they would prefer to eat cultural food only at cultural events. Participant 2 (age 19) mentioned pierogies and cabbage rolls as food they look forward to on holidays, but also did not have an interest in learning more about it. Participant 4 (age 21) mentioned food as being a practicality rather than something they want to explore, and said: "*as long as it fills up my belly it's fine.*"

An interesting finding from this section is that even though the importance of cultural and traditional foods in food security has been highlighted in literature, the youth in this thesis have expressed that cultural food is not so much a need as it is a want. Before the question about cultural foods was asked, only four out of the 23 youth had mentioned, unprompted, anything about having such foods in their diets. Only three of the youth participants mentioned feeling a need for this food in their day-to-day meals. None of the youth, both those who wanted to seek out cultural and childhood foods in their diets and those who did not, mentioned their food security is impacted by having access to these meals. Therefore, while for some youth access to these meals may provide comfort and connection to their roots, and play a part in creating more ownership and meaning in what they eat, it can also be said that when it comes to food security, cultural food is not a primary, but a secondary need.

5.3 Barriers to eating enough and eating preferred foods: How do youth feel about accessing food services available to them

Food access is one of the barriers to food security, which comes from not being able to obtain the food necessary to maintain a healthy diet, often because of financial reasons. This is where food support organizations attempt to fill the gap. As discussed before, both primary and secondary food support organizations operate within the Thunder Bay community and offer their services to youth. Youth participants in this research study were selected based on the parameter that they have accessed some kind of food support at least once in their lifetime. The participants were asked to share their experiences with receiving this support. This information was gathered in order to gauge their level of accessibility and comfort with various organizations, and what they liked and did not like. This would help us understand how effective these organizations were in supporting the community, from the viewpoints of the youth. It is to be noted, that while some of the participants were currently using these supports regularly, some only spoke of their past experiences, and further discussed their thoughts around accessing them at present.

5.3.1 Positive Experience with Food Support Programs/Services

Thirteen participants out of the 23 mentioned that they had some positive experience around food support programs/services. This data is important to consider, because this tells us what strategies employed by organizations work best.

Secondary Support:

Starting with secondary support programs, three different programs were mentioned which participants enjoyed. Participants 7 and 2 talked about having accessed an affordable food market that takes place every week at a subsidized housing complex, where food is sold at cost and by the count, which makes it cheaper than grocery store prices. Participant 7 (age 19) who lived in that complex said it was comforting to know they could shop several times a month in small amounts, and have fresh produce available to cook with. Youth tend to feel more comfortable with food that they have purchased themselves, and tend to feel better about consuming it. At this point, this market is only offered in one location in the city, which makes access difficult for residents living far away.

Participant 5 (age 25) talked about an ethnic cooking program that is run by a local non-profit organization, supporting newcomer immigrant women with English Language skills. The program provides a space to utilize their cooking skills, eventually leading to training in food safety, shopping and budgeting, large scale food preparation, catering and business strategies. This program created that space where participants were empowered to lead the programming, and each day included a hands-on component where participants enjoyed experiential learning. It can be said that similar long-term cooking skills programming for Indigenous youth led by Indigenous organizations could create similar feelings of connection, and teach youth how to find and incorporate traditional foods in their daily lives.

Participants 7 and 3 spoke about a credit-based program they participated in through school, held at a local non-profit organization. They both spoke about bringing home skills around budgeting and planning that they have been able to apply to their lives. Participant 7 (age 19) has a strong interest in cooking, but the price of food and cooking facilities has always been a barrier for them. They said these barriers were removed when they worked in the kitchen at this organization, and they were able to try new food and explore their skills.

The interesting thing about both the programs above is the feeling of freedom to explore their skills in the kitchen, which provides a sense of ownership over the task at hand and creates greater engagement. This is not surprising because both these programs have been conducted by the same organization that created a Dignified Food Access campaign, and their methods of giving power back to the participants to dictate their own learning is seeing success.

Primary Support:

Speaking about food banks, some of the participants discussed the variety of foods that are available, and especially appreciated having the ability to pick and choose the kinds of foods they liked. Participants also mentioned that some soup kitchens have a section of fresh produce, milk, bread, and other essentials available, which they regularly take advantage of. Participant 10 (age 27) said they really relied on this food that was available to them. Participant 13 (age 27) mentioned a local church where they regularly eat, where they are also able to browse food items to bring home. Participant 12 (age 28) expressed an appreciation for the 'shopping model' some food banks have. It is clear from these conversations that when accessing direct support, youth appreciate the feeling of choice rather than someone else's judgement over what they should be eating, and to have some level of ownership around what they bring home. A few participants mentioned the Christmas Cheer program, which provides food hampers to individuals, families, and couples. This program has been found to be helpful in the holiday season, and Participant 8 (age 20) mentioned the hampers contained enough food to last for up to two weeks.

Some organizations that work in secondary support shifted to a direct food support approach during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of those organizations started providing bags of food for students who were attending online school, since many students relied on school lunches and snacks that stopped due to school closures. Participant 2 (age 19) said they felt this model was more dignified, since they were given high quality foods which came in generic shopping bags, so it never looked like they were bringing home food donations. This organization made a point to deliberately make the food access process more dignified, and thought of not only what the participants would need in the food bags, but what they would like or want. This level of attention might not be possible at every organization; however, it goes on to show that when it is made possible to spare staff to do planning, the quality of the service improves.

Participant 5 (age 25) said that even though primary support places did not provide everything they would need to make a proper meal, they were able to get creative with what they received: "*to be honest with you, you will not be able to make like a really good and a big meal of them. But those ingredients are like essential for other foods. So, you can take like some of the ingredients and put them with other ingredients and make a good meal.*" This is an example of youth demonstrating resourcefulness when working with what they receive, and is largely due to this participant's experience with food-handling, and the skills of their mother with feeding a family of six.

Another aspect of these services that participants liked was the feeling of being welcomed into these spaces, and a number of participants mentioned this to be an important factor for their food access. Participant 10 said this made them feel more inclined to access their services. They also expressed that it was nice to see their friends going there. Participant 12 (age 28) talked about the connections they have made at these sites, and the absence of judgement, which is something many youth may be worried about: "*that's probably one of the best resources, not even because of what they give out. But just the people right, like going there. And just like talking with*

some of the ladies, you know, like I've actually like, gotten to know some of them." Speaking of the same soup kitchen, Participant 11 said the customer service and non-judgmental attitude of staff members made them feel welcome in that space. Something as simple as a greeting can have an immediate effect on youth arriving at these locations, Participant 18 stated.

It is of interest to note that most of the youth who have discussed their positive experiences with food support have been in the older age group. This indicates that there might be a correlation with lived experience and resourcefulness, and an ability to set aside personal feelings and prioritize their needs. For younger youth, these needs may look very different and centre more around self-image, for the shift to happen later in life. However, a higher level of initiative, motivation, and action coming from the youth, to some extent, does have an impact on how well they eat. Participant 19 (age 30), who has been very proactive about locating and accessing resources while being in unstable housing for the past year, went so far as to say: "*to be perfectly honest, in my opinion, it's impossible to go hungry in this town. There's food everywhere. All you got to do is know where to go… I didn't know about any of this stuff until I found myself actually struggling. And like, I got brought there [shelter]. And then there's that church right there. Same thing, like right there [pointing to different buildings]. Both those churches do free lunches and stuff, it's good. It's hot food and stuff.*"

5.3.2 Challenges with Food Support Programs/Services

Despite many of the participants having good things to say about these services, some of the participants felt the opposite. Among them were youth who needed to access services despite not feeling comfortable, youth who had a need but chose to find alternatives, and youth who had accessed these services in the past and felt glad that they no longer needed to.

The most common theme around the hesitation to access direct food support stems from the association with stigma and judgement. Five participants mentioned this as something they considered as a barrier. This stigma that people face and the judgement they are concerned about, not only come from strangers or passers-by, but often come from their peers, friends, or people in their circles. Especially with young people, who may place more emphasis on appearances to others as part of their self-image, and may not have grown out of that sensitivity to how they are perceived, this may be one of the biggest barriers. It Is, therefore, important to teach youth about dignity and respect in food access from an early age, so that not only will youth feel less shame around it, but they will also be the ones normalizing food access and will not become the cause of someone feeling ashamed.

In the previous section, some of the youth mentioned their positive interactions with staff at food support services; however, some of the youth have experienced quite the opposite. Participant 23 (age 30), who has both accessed services and worked at these places as a volunteer, observed how the stigma sometimes stems from within the system: "*not everybody who volunteers there has a heart of gold. And like, they make*

their own comments too… And like, and I get it, because they see these people all the time. And like, they probably seen them at their very worst, whether the''re either if the''re drinking, or if the''re on drugs, or if they just have mental illness problems that are like not kept in check…. And I'm sure they get desensitized to it and fed up with it. And like, and so those comments do come out." The Dignified Food Access campaign, in fact, tackles this very issue within food support organizations, and urges the staff and volunteers to focus on creating that safe, non-judgemental, and welcoming space.

Another barrier to accessing these services that many participants face may be their interactions with other people who also access these services. Participant 16 (age 19) said they were hesitant to access food from certain areas of the city, especially with their child. Participant 7 (age 19) mentioned the unpleasant experience of having to compete for decent food, where other patrons would often take more than what they need. For some youth, the feeling of being in a non-supportive space can be difficult. Participant 16 (age 19) talked about their anxiety with being around large crowds, which also prevents them from accessing services. Participant 7 (age 19) expressed their thoughts around this feeling of being part of a statistic: "*the workers are just telling you where to go. You're not allowed to take what you need. And sometimes they just give you things that you're not gonna use. And it's hard to feel good about*."

Beyond the discomfort of attending these establishments to access food support, some participants also mentioned challenges they had faced with the food itself. Participant 11 (age 21) described the food as "*probably not the food that I would choose myself.*" Participant 7 (age 19) spoke of the lack of diversity in food items, which forced them to eat repetitive meals every day. They also discussed receiving food they did not know how to use, such as dry beans. Participant 2 (age 19) felt that there was no point accessing food support, because they would not use any of the food that were past the best-before date that they would receive. Participant 22 (age 18) explained: "*beggars can't be choosers, but like, I don't think that should be a thing… I remember like getting like, close to expired or expired food. Yeah, nasty, but it didn't matter. You know, we're eating, you know, so that's what it is.*" Youth may sometimes feel unworthy of better-quality food because they were receiving it for free, which impacts their self-worth and self-esteem.

This issue around being served food past the best-before date, and feeling they had to accept lesser quality food, was a common theme among participants who disliked food support services. There seems to be a lack of education around where the food at food banks and soup kitchens come from. Much of this donated food is, in fact, rescued food from grocery stores, which cannot be sold beyond the printed best-before dates, and if not distributed immediately would need to be disposed of. Without knowledge of and experience with handling food, youth do not know better than to think that food actually goes bad the day after that date has passed. This is why it is important to include education of this sort into food skills programming, and maybe even at food banks and soup kitchens where these foods are distributed. Assumptions that people will know this is not sufficient - many youth grow up without proper guidance around food literacy and

they may never have had a supportive adult teach them basic food skills that many of us take for granted.

The barriers around receiving food also revolve around logistics that some people are not up to date with. Requiring identification documents, including an address has been found to be a big barrier for people, limiting their access to certain food banks. Participant 15 had previously mentioned the difficulties with obtaining identification documents, which stem from problems they cannot solve without support. Participant 18 (age 18), who is in unstable housing, said they did not attend food banks because of their lack of an identification document, and did not go to a soup kitchen because of the cost of bus fare. Three participants mentioned they had experienced going to a food bank and not receiving food because they were late. The lineups often felt undignified, and sometimes unsafe because of others in line, and youth found it difficult to distance during the pandemic. Transportation was a problem mentioned by five people, not just for getting there on time, but also for carrying the food back. When accessing food support, the process of signing up, maintaining the specific dates and times, arranging for transportation and childcare, and so forth, can be a barrier for some who are already overwhelmed with the existing challenges of their lives.

Lack of knowledge about these support resources is another barrier that especially younger youth face. Participant 15 (age 19) said they were quite lost when it came to accessing services, and recommended better informational awareness: "*maybe they should go into, like high schools and stuff like that, because like with me, I never had the parents, I never had that, that sense of guardianship for someone to show me what to do. So how am I going to know what to do when no one was there to tell me what to do? Maybe if they go into schools and have that lesson, or like teaching, meeting, whatever you want to call it, to advocate.*" This was an interesting consideration, and highlights the need to think about youth who did not have supported guidance growing up when it came to finding and securing resources. Much like youth need support navigating the systems of childhood to adulthood in terms of school and employment, teachings around these basic life skills should be considered essential and incorporated into support.

In summary, youth have indicated difficulties around judgement and stigma, experienced both from their peers as well as from support staff, and negative interactions with other patrons at these locations. Youth have highlighted a need for more welcoming and supportive spaces, where they can not only safely obtain the food they need, but also feel comfortable and respected in doing so. The quality of food at some locations have been discussed, and it appears more information and guidance around utilizing donated food is necessary for people to feel comfortable receiving them. It has also been seen that the logistics and requirements around food access services themselves create a barrier to access, and initiatives to facilitate this process for youth will be helpful. Finally, there is a need for greater awareness and advertisement of available services, since many youth, especially those new to the life of relying on support, may not know how to navigate this system.

5.3.3 Experience with Secondary Food Support Organizations

Most of the challenges youth spoke about centred around primary food support. In order to understand how youth felt about programs that provided not only food, but also more in-depth learning and skill development, participants were asked to discuss their experience with programs that offer secondary support. This could take place in the form of providing food skills, life skills, social connections, recreation, and education, and may sometimes provide food and other supplies for their members.

Six of the youth participants mentioned hearing about or accessing food support through school, including school breakfast/lunch programs, snacks and food from the principal's office, services like 211, food delivery support, and opportunities to volunteer at soup kitchens. Two participants mentioned accessing school food programs, and two other participants, who identified as Indigenous, mentioned accessing food at the Four Directions room at school. Youth generally mentioned feeling safe and comfortable obtaining food at school, and did not mention any feelings of stigma when getting food since teachers encouraged it, and most of their friends were also using it.

Seven participants mentioned cooking programs that they had attended through school or organizations they had been involved with. Participant 3 (age 21), who joined a cooking skills development program for school credits, received skills that they could apply to their daily lives, such as shopping from grocery stores on a budget. Such skills are important to learn, especially for youth who live alone, or have to budget their money strategically. Four participants said it was fun cooking with other people, and two of the participants said they enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to bring the food that they cooked home to have later. Participant 21 (age 18), who had attended various structured programming throughout their life, including cooking programs in group settings, said the connection and relationships formed through those programs, especially with the staff, helped with their mental health. This goes on to show that while these programs are aimed at providing direct skills in food literacy, they do have scope to venture beyond this. They are in a unique position to build relationships with their participants, and because of the small group sizes they often have, they have the potential to offer need-based, individual support, given the resources.

Similar to accessing direct food support, transportation was often a barrier for youth when trying to access secondary support sites. Participant 14 (age 21) said they wished these programs came with rides. While some of the programs do have their own insured vehicles, not all do, and this is an issue that one of the staff participants recognized as well. Moreover, getting information about some of these resources has been difficult for some participants, and youth brought up the need for greater advertisement.

Youth mentioned several other indirect food support options they had heard of, but not necessarily accessed. Two other participants mentioned local pizza restaurants which provided free or pay-what-you-can pizzas for people who needed it. Another participant spoke of a 'Blessings Box' in their neighbourhood, where people could donate food and other items and pick up what they needed. One participant talked about a soup van they

had seen around town. People often have various reasons for not accessing these kinds of support. Not knowing about them is one; many of these smaller scale resources are not advertised and people get to know about them through exposure or word of mouth. One of the participants said they had never accessed the free pizza even though they knew about it, because they never felt the need to be strong enough, and did not want to take away from people who may need it more.

Overall, it can be seen that youth felt generally comfortable obtaining food from school, where supportive adults encouraged it, and their friends also participated. Youth enjoyed cooking programs when they had the ability to explore their skills in the kitchen, and incentives such as school credits or an employment wage encouraged youth to attend regularly. Youth found these programs helpful, not only for their food-related skills, but the environment of connection and support also helped them with a sense of belonging. Similar to the direct support, youth felt better attending programs which treated them with respect and dignity, and they preferred to have an active part to play in the programs.

5.3.4 Preferences for Food Acquisition

Following the discussion of youths' experiences with both direct and indirect support organizations, this section attempts to identify what youth prefer as their food acquisition sources. Six of the youth said they felt safe and comfortable obtaining food when they paid for it, and not from support organizations at all. Two participants said they liked getting food from friends and family when they needed it. Two participants who regularly eat at work said that was a reliable source of food. Two participants said they did not mind receiving food from secondary support places. Three participants who relied mostly on direct food support said these primary services were preferred sources for them.

It is clear that based on life experiences and needs, people have different levels of comfort around accessing various support sources. The way food support organizations work is effective for some and not effective for others. It might be interesting to examine what kind of support, education, or assistance might increase youths' level of comfort around accessing.

Participants were further asked to discuss situations that did not feel safe and comfortable. Four people said they would rather not access direct food support, especially due to the environment at these places. Participant 18 (age 18), who did not have access to a stable house or direct food support, said they did accept food from the friend's family they were living with, but only what was left after everyone else was finished eating. Participant 20 (age 18) who experienced anxiety around others said no place felt safe and comfortable to them, and everywhere would present a difficulty obtaining food from. Participant 7 (age 19) mentioned secondary food support can also become uncomfortable sometimes, and spoke about an interaction with the staff where they were made to feel inferior for accessing the service.

An important observation so far has been that youth often feel hesitation around asking for food, despite there being various resources available to support them. It may be something internal that youth need to overcome before they are able to become proactive around their own food security, but food support organizations should also develop strategies to create spaces which are geared towards making youth feel safe, dignified, and welcomed. This could be done through staff and volunteer training around compassion, friendly and engaging conversations, choices of food, comfortable and welcoming dining spaces, to name a few. Various organizations may have programs to help youth reach that level of confidence, but it is something that needs long-term nurturing, and maybe even work on improving self-esteem and feelings of worthiness.

5.4 Understanding of food skills and interest in learning food skills: What barriers do youth face around cooking and eating their preferred foods

It was considered important for the purpose of this research study to understand the capacity of youth when it comes to eating in their preferred ways. As was seen when discussing barriers, food skills and a capacity to prepare food is almost as important a barrier as income and food acquisition. Being able to prepare the food that youth obtain is directly connected to how well they are eating, and possibly even dictates what food items they bring home. It can be generally assumed that buying groceries and cooking food at home can be cheaper and healthier than eating regularly from fast food restaurants. It was found during this study that despite this, youth may often find alternative food options because of difficulties in food preparation at home. Youth were asked to discuss the barriers they faced around at-home cooking, and then they were asked what support they would need to practice this more.

The three barriers mentioned by the greatest number of participants were food skills (11 participants), food cost (seven participants) and cooking facilities (seven participants). Barriers such as knowledge around planning, time, tiredness, motivation/Interest, transportation, and physical health problems were each mentioned by three participants each. Four participants also mentioned mental health as a barrier, and two participants mentioned physical access and proximity to grocery stores.

Food skills is an umbrella term that includes various aspects including planning and budgeting, shopping, following recipes, chopping and cleaning, measurements, specific knowledge about time and temperature, and storage of unused perishable food as well as leftovers. These skills can come from parents or guardians growing up, from school foods classes, from programming they have attended in their lives, or from having a natural interest sharpened by cooking shows and videos that they may watch. Participant 8 (age 20) said their skill level around food is sufficient to allow them to survive, but does not let them explore foods they would like to try: "*I don't know how to cook fish, you know, like, pick up a fish from the store. Cook it. I've never done that. Which, fish is kinda very healthy.*" Participant 7 (age 19) said that they like to eat food from other cultures, but do not know how to make it properly. Youth who have a base level of interest and some skills in cooking and learning might be the group that self-

select into cooking programs, and form a majority of the participants that support organizations usually work with.

For youth who have not had lived experience with this process, the idea of cooking can be daunting. Participant 1 (age 19) said "*balancing directions and common sense while cooking to make it work*" can be a challenge. Participant 2's (age 19) comment demonstrated that youth can be at various skill levels, and even with knowledge in one area of food preparation, such as recipe literacy, a lack of experience in another, such as purchasing proper ingredients, can make cooking difficult. An example of this was given by Participant 4 (age 21), who said they had a root of ginger and the recipe had called for it, but they had no idea how to turn the root into a usable shape. This represents the group of youth who cooking programs should find a way to target, because even the most basic skills, if delivered properly, have the potential to make significant improvements in their eating habits.

Meal planning seems to be a food skills barrier for participants who have little time and energy after work for food preparation. Even when youth have the skills to prepare a meal for themselves, many of them found difficulties with preserving leftovers or perishables. Another participant mentioned wanting to learn proper storage techniques, including defrosting frozen food. While programs around cooking skills teach youth how to use ingredients bought for particular meals to be cooked that day, there is usually no aspect of learning how to prepare and store leftover food items for later use. It might be highly beneficial for youth if skills such as cooking for the week, or shopping for a week and storing items in a way that makes it easy to prepare food later, was incorporated into cooking programs.

A lack of skills is not the only factor that prevents youth from being involved with their food. Tiredness is a theme that has come up a number of times, and some participants related this to mental health. Participant 22 (age 18) said: "*sometimes your mental health just won't let you. And it's like, just because your mental health won't let you doesn't mean you don't deserve access to good food.*" Participant 6 (age 19), who lives with their mother and does not cook at home, said they could not think of why they ate so much takeout, other than just not wanting to cook. Participant 7 (age 19), who loves cooking and experiments with new recipes when they have everything available, mentioned that tiredness sometimes gets in the way of cooking. This can be especially difficult for youth who don't live with family or friends, and do not have social support around them to help with their food needs.

Aside from having the skills to cook, having a space and the supplies to cook can also be an important necessity when it comes to feeding oneself. There were three participants who did not have access to a kitchen at all. For them, access to food was dependent on what they could obtain from charitable food organizations, or friends and family. Naturally, these participants had less ownership over the kind of food they ate. This speaks to the need for housing going hand in hand with food security, and it is yet another problem direct food support cannot help with. There have been secondary

support organizations who help youth find housing and advocate for their needs, but actually getting a spot in these programs depends on availability, among other factors.

Seven participants had access to a kitchen, and had difficulties that varied in their range. Participant 7 (age 19) lived with six others in their house, and said even though having a kitchen made cooking easier, they had very little space to store pantry ingredients. Two participants said the house they lived in was not well ventilated, and cooking was difficult in the summer because of overheating. Participant 8 (age 20) said they did not use their stove at all in the summers, and relied on their oven and Crock-Pot instead. The size of the kitchen itself can be a barrier, where if the kitchen is too small more than one person cannot cook at the same time. Not having enough counter space meant not being able to lay out the ingredients that they needed, or not having enough space for food preparation.

The third top barrier to cooking and eating their preferred way came from the cost of the food itself, and even among those who had enough money to avoid hunger, some still struggled with eating the foods they wanted to eat. When asked about including fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet, Participant 12 (age 28) said fresh food is expensive and gets eaten quickly, and they cannot afford to buy more later in the month. This participant chooses to buy items that are filling and last long, such as rice, pasta, and potatoes. Two other participants mentioned that because they lived with other people, if they wanted to cook something they would have to buy enough ingredients to feed five to eight other people, and therefore chose to not do it at all.

This section highlights the need for secondary food support when it comes to food security for youth. While direct provision attempts to solve the problem of access, there is still a matter of utilization, where youth need resources and skills that they can apply in their own situations. The following section investigates the kinds of support youth think they need, in order for them to appropriately utilize the food that is available to them.

5.5 Understanding the supports youth need: What do youth feel they need to help them improve their food situations

5.5.1. Overall Support Indicated by Youth

It can be clearly seen that food skills and food literacy only form part of the web of challenges associated with food security. Other components such as housing, transportation, and income require more systematic solutions, which require the involvement of policy makers and often have lengthy proceedings before change occurs. Food skills on the other hand, can be provided to youth by anyone in their lives experienced with food, including family members, friends, teachers, or youth support workers. Much like the saying “teach a man to fish…”, providing the knowledge and skills around eating on a budget and with limited supplies could equip and empower youth to take control of their own food habits and increase independence. Secondary

support organizations, within the capacity of their resources, could focus on this area as a starting point.

When asked about what support they would like more of, six participants mentioned food literacy. This meant different things for different participants. Two participants mentioned they would like more knowledge around the technicalities of food preparation, such as how long to cook something in the oven and how to butcher a whole chicken. Three participants said they could use support with knowing what kind of food to buy and eat, such as meal preparation strategies, easy to follow recipes, and guidelines around what meals should look like. Participant 14 (age 21) mentioned if meal kits were available to buy that would help a lot, and that would remove the need to know how much of what to add. Four other participants, who had basic cooking skills, expressed an interest in learning how to cook food that was different from what they regularly ate. Two of these participants mostly made quick microwave or oven food and wished to diversify their diet. Two participants mostly ate balanced meals at home and wanted to branch out and try recipes from other cultures and countries.

Three participants said they needed support around finances, so that they could afford more food. Participant 2 (age 19), who works two jobs, said: "*I need to be financially supported so I can have time to eat. And then I can also buy the stuff I need to eat.*" Participant 7 (age 19) highlighted that these barriers are not stand alone, and a lot of areas in their life needed support: "*I need the food… I need like utensils and things. I need proper cooking pans… I don't even own a good oven. I need somewhere to store my food. You know, it's like, there's so many things that I would need.*" Two participants said they had kitchen spaces and all the basic supplies, including access to food, but lacked motivation. Participant 4 (age 21) said they hope motivation will come when their child grows up and asks for specific things to eat, and Participant 3 (age 21) said they need to get into a routine and take care of themselves, and hoped motivation would follow.

These responses appear to be a reflection of some of the barriers youth had discussed so far, and focused around the three themes of food literacy, cooking space, and money. It can be noticed that although factors such as transportation, mental health, resource awareness, difficulties with food support, and so forth were not mentioned by participants as aspects they needed support with, they were mentioned as barriers before. This highlights the fact that when asked directly, youth often tend to focus on the most obvious problem, and sometimes less visible, or tertiary barriers, are not talked about. This is why it is important for researchers, as well as support persons working with youth, to identify the different barriers youth face, which they may or may not voluntarily discuss, and develop appropriate and targeted support strategies.

5.5.2 Support around Cultural and Childhood Foods

Although youth participants did not talk about cultural foods as part of their food security needs to a degree that it could be considered a requirement, they did express appreciation for their traditional foods, and expressed an interest in learning about and

connecting with their cultures. Participants were asked to discuss any skills they would like to have from their cultures or traditions. Seventeen participants answered this question, and four of them said they felt they had sufficient skills and did not feel the need to learn more. This was an interesting question because the answers were very diverse, and in many cases specific to each participant.

Two participants mentioned wanting to learn how to make bannock. Even though it is something made with simple ingredients, bannock can be made many different ways. Participant 22 (age 18) said: "*I can't make my mom's bannock and probably… Just like she probably doesn't know she can make my kukom's banncok. Probably just like my kukom doesn't know how to make her kukom's bannock. You know what I'm saying?*" Eight more participants discussed wanting to learn various cooking skills. Participant 4 (age 21), having a Polish background, said they would love to learn recipes from their grandmother which they ate as a child, such as pierogies, cabbage rolls and pickles. Another participant talked about wanting to learn recipes their mother makes, and that it is important to learn hands-on, because there are certain details that recipes do not include. These kinds of skills, which are specific to families, cannot be taught by support programs, but would require an initiative taken by the youth themselves to obtain.

Participant 10 (age 27) mentioned that they wanted to join a cooking program to gain first-hand skills in cooking techniques, such as "*heat and temperature, and chopping properly*". The idea of cooking programs with an organization also seemed interesting to Participant 14 (age 21), but they pointed out that without rides to and from those places, they could not attend. Two of the participants, who are a couple, said they wanted to get into foraging, because Participant 15's (age 19) grandfather had introduced this to them as a child. They also mentioned an interest in building a greenhouse, since their partner (Participant 16, age 19) grew up eating from their grandmother's garden and wanted one of their own. These are some things that local food support organizations can indeed help with; however, the specific nature of these needs will require the youth to seek out these supports. Sometimes that itself is a barrier, and in such cases, when the youth have a supportive adult, such as a teacher, a guardian, or a worker they are close with, they would be the ones helping youth to make these connections.

Some of the youth had previous experience with cultural practices such as hunting and fishing, and although no longer actively involved in this, fondly reminisced about their experiences. Participant 3 (age 21) said that although they learned how to fillet fish and smoke meat at school, they had never skinned a moose and wished they knew how to do that. Participant 9 (age 19) shared this sentiment and said: "*I just wish I was like, readily able to like, just skin and work with the animal? Like, I don't really remember how to do that.*" Participant 23 (age 30) mentioned wanting to learn how to process animals: "*I'd like to learn how to butcher more wild game… If I were to shoot a deer, like I wouldn't know what to do with it. Like, aside from getting the guts out of it, like once it's there, like, how do you get it into the meat form? So, there's this, there's definitely a skill gap there. And like, it's not something that is generally widely taught where you can just go and be like, teach me how to butcher a deer*?"

The point raised by Participant 23 is important. There is indeed a lack of programs around hunting and other traditional teachings available to youth in Thunder Bay, and this was brought up with staff participants as well, and will be discussed later. Interestingly, an Elder staff participant had brought up a series of instructional hunting videos released by one of their contacts at a northern community. Conversations with youth have not led to discussions around how they would respond to watching videos to learn about traditional practices, but these resources do exist. An example is The Hunter's Journey online course offered by Chris Gilmour and Caleb Muskgrave, open to students around the world. Another local example is the Indigenous Food Circle, in partnership with the Sustainable Food Systems Lab through the Lakehead University, and they produce instructional and experiential videos from various traditional practices which they undertake in and around Thunder Bay.

5.5.3 Recommendations from Youth

As youth discussed programs and services they had experiences with, they also provided some suggestions on how to make these initiatives more accessible for their peers. Some of them were regarding making the logistical requirements easier for people, because "*some people may not have an address; some people may have a learning disability and can't fill out forms; some people may not have the right documentation to get an ID*" (Participant 4, age 21). Help with transport, or food delivery for those who cannot physically go, were also suggested. Participant 6 (age 19) said making the process of cooking seem less complicated would help: "*maybe just like, simpler things, because I feel like, people are scared of cooking because sometimes it's like a lot. They could have done like, simpler things.*" Participant 2 (age 19) brought up the dignity aspect of these services: "*I don't really know... you know less expired food, treating me like a person, umm, rather than just like, like you are part of just everybody. There is no individualization there.*"

Feeling safe when asking for support is important for youth, and Participant 15 (age 19) mentioned they liked the one-on-one support they received from their youth outreach worker, and the trust that had developed allowed them to be vulnerable and ask for help. Participant 8 (age 20) said they received support from their school around food access, and this positive interaction with teachers has led them to suggest that schools should provide more widespread food support for students and their families. Youth are a difficult demographic to build trust with, especially if they had negative experiences with authorities in the past. A large part of longer-term supportive programs centre around building rapport with youth.

On the other hand, connecting youth with resources that they are not ready to utilize, can cause added stress for the youth. Participant 4 (age 21) said they felt overwhelmed by the resources given to them, it was too much work to access, and sometimes their workers' suggestions did not work. It is important to gather feedback from these youth around what supports are appropriate, and well-received. The only way to create greater engagement, not just attendance, is to deliver programs and services that youth are ready to receive and accept.

From the overall conversations with the youth, it can be said that while meeting their primary needs around food security, which is availability, access, utilization, and stability of food, is important, there are several secondary and tertiary needs that youth need met before they are able to sustainably achieve food security. While organizations have paid attention to and tried to support youth with their secondary needs such as food skills, financial literacy, and life skills, there still remains a matter of youth feeling comfortable, confident and motivated to seek out support, and successfully utilize them. These tertiary needs can be thought of as a need to feel empowered and worthy, an internal feeling that allows them to feel ready to receive the services that are available to them.

The next section will examine these same issues from the point of view of the organizations these youth generally receive support from. The purpose of this is to understand which of the needs of the youth these organizations have attempted to meet, and find some gaps between the services being provided and the youth having access to them.

Chapter 6: The Other Side of the Table

Fourteen participants were interviewed from eight different community-based organizations. In this chapter, the participants are identified with a number and a letter. The number represents the organization they belong to, and the letter distinguishes individuals within that organization.

The interviews started with an overview of the organizational goals and mandates to gain an understanding of their role in the community. Three of the organizations provided primary food support; one was a food bank, one a soup kitchen, and one a high school breakfast program. One participant did not represent their organization, but was an Indigenous Elder who shared their experience working with youth in the community. The other five provided secondary support, and some were more involved in using food as a tool than others. Among these, one organization provided direct cooking classes in low-income neighbourhoods aimed at children and families. Another organization used food and urban farming as a tool for youth employment, and provided transferable skills for future employment, as well as wrap-around support for other life's needs. One program was focused on after-school recreation, which provided some cooking classes and used daily dinners as a draw to encourage youth to join. The last organization provided one-on-one support to youth around their various needs of life, including food access. A brief overview of these organizations can be found in Appendix F.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, two of the secondary support organizations changed their working model and focused more on direct food support for the people they work with. Two of the organizations did not do direct food support, but continued their cooking programs on a virtual platform while creating and supplying meal kits for participants to follow along at home. The food support occurring at school was stopped temporarily during school closures, and that funding got redirected to a local non-profit organization to provide food hampers for online students. The food bank closed for a while, then reopened with a pre-packaged food distribution model. The soup kitchen continued at a greater capacity throughout the pandemic, removing the dine-in option and only providing takeout meals.

6.1 Recognizing Needs and Acting Upon Them

It was seen from the youth participant interviews that the needs of youth around food security were varied, and required layers of support to ultimately help them get what they needed. In this section, staff participants were asked to think about how their organizations designed and delivered programs, in order to meet the needs of the youth they were serving. More specifically, participants were asked to discuss the core values of their organization to determine what areas of community support they aimed to focus on. It is hoped that their areas of focus would determine what these organizations perceive to be the needs of the community.

For the direct food support organizations the perceived need was simply hunger, but all of the participants also recognized the underlying need for dignity around receiving food. Participant 3A recognized that for some, the meal people receive from a soup kitchen might be their only meal for the day, and tried to ensure that nutritious, balanced meals were prepared daily. Their organization has a Kitchen Manager (Participant 3B) who makes decisions around the daily menu. They mentioned that sometimes they would receive similar food items through donations several days in a row, but attempted to change up the recipes, so that the people receiving food do not feel they have to eat repetitive meals every day.

It was found that with many organizations that their model of operation is an ever-evolving process based on community needs. The soup kitchen that was included in this research observed that patrons arrived at their door at varying hours, and extended their service window during the pandemic. They have now decided to make those hours permanent. A similar program that took place in the city during this time is Emergency Food Bags, which recognized that many children and youth in the city relied on their schools for food and were deprived of this during school closures and virtual schooling. Participant 1A discussed their efforts to make this initiative dignified and welcoming: "*the unique part of this that we did was there was no registration you didn't have to show ID you didn't have to prove anything you just showed up and got a bag… we always run out of bags that was the other really interesting piece… because everyone needs access to food and it was apparent very quickly that that need was there.*"

Participant 1B, who works with various groups within the community, talked about the diverse groups they support, such as people without unstable housing and demographics with cultural dietary needs, and how they adapt their food hampers to be appropriate. When asked whether these supports would continue once the pandemic was over, Participant 1B mentioned the Community Food Centre they are bringing to the city, which will allow these groups to attend in-person. This establishment of the Community Food Centre is an important addition to the community, which will address many of the concerns youth have mentioned around food access. Dignity and respect are key themes with this project, and Participant 1C spoke to the environment and experiences they want to create. They discussed that dignified food access includes access to welcoming spaces, where patrons can feel respected and valued, where they can have positive interactions with others, and when it is time to eat, they would find options that are appropriate for their cultural and dietary needs.

While it appears the above-mentioned organization has done extensive work at the grassroots level to support the needs of their participants, other organizations were also found to have made similar efforts within the constraints of their resources. Participant 2A, with a neighbourhood community kitchen program, said they usually gathered insight form community members, and then as a group developed strategies to actualize relevant programs. They said that during COVID-19, they had held an informational dinner event to promote a cooking program, and the overwhelming response from the community urged them to remove the programming component and only provide meal support, which they found to be the most pressing need.

Besides direct food support, staff participants also spoke about secondary supports their organizations provide. Participant 1C mentioned a few different programs their organization facilitated when asked about their work with the youth demographic. This included cooking skills development programs with various First Nations schools and alternative education programs, and all of that took place at their industrial scale kitchen, located on-site. They recognized the need, which youth participants had also identified, to provide a space where youth could gather and interact with each other, while learning new skills in a supportive environment. When the youth are not coming to their kitchen space, this organization has staff working at Public and Catholic schools in the city, in their classrooms and gardens, making access easier for youth who may not have had this opportunity unless it was brought directly to them.

By building rapport throughout the school year using consistent programming, the staff present themselves as easygoing and approachable, encouraging the youth to open up about their lives and their needs, which is then used to hire some of the most at-risk youth into their supportive employment program. This organization has a few other long-term programs which they approach through food and cooking, eventually branching off to provide support around the needs of life. An example is a seven-week cooking program earning youth co-op credits as well as hourly wage, which addresses food access through cooking skills development, learning from guest chefs, eating together as a group, and taking meals home. Another example is a lunch program at two adult education centres in town, where students are encouraged to cook with staff prior to lunch hour, and food thus becomes an incentive for higher school attendance.

Participant 2A discussed that they worked from an asset-based community development perspective, and focused on what the youth wanted to gain out of their programs. This translated to cooking programs mostly led by the youth, with staff stepping in when needed while building on the youths' strengths. Another neighbourhood organization (Participant 6A) provided after-school recreational activities on a drop-in basis. They focused on creating a calm, safe environment for youth, where they could unwind and take part in games and socializing, and eat a full dinner prepared by staff. Registered programs mostly focus on virtual cooking where meal kits are provided to the youth to participate from home. They talked about introducing new programming around volunteer hours through cooking, and mental health resources as they move out of COVID-19 restrictions in the near future.

Some of these organizations have created their programming to address the lateral needs that affect and are affected by food security. Participant 1B said: "*I think income is the main factor. I think food insecurity is about poverty.*" Their organization addresses this through employing youth in urban farming and various cooking programs, and further providing them with skills to find meaningful work on their own. Barriers other than income have also been acknowledged by this organization, which follows a Sustainable Livelihood model to assess the needs of their participants. Participant 1D explained how this is applied in their programming:

> "*In the programming with youth, we use the sustainable livelihoods approach. And what that does is it looks at seven different social locators and asks you to be able to reflect on them, you know, their basic needs, where are they at? Do they have bus tickets? Do they have access to the internet? Do they have access to safe housing? You know, what is their sense of self? And how do they see themselves? What are their community connections? How do they keep their money? Do they go to cash money and spend it? Or like, do they live in the cash economy? What's their education and training goals? And then what's the Medical, their mental, physical, emotional health, where they might (be) asking youth to look at those things, it allows us to find the areas in which we can support them. So, it really is individualized. So, each kid that comes has an individualized kind of profile that they then need support on or ask for support on or we offer support on."*

This participant also discussed how this information is then used to not only support the youth who actively participate in programming, but the data gathered is used to coordinate city-wide initiatives through advocacy and partnerships.

One of the organizations, which employs youth navigators to work with people aged 12 to 24, provides support in food access and other areas of need, both in individual and group settings. Participant 4A said they approach their work from a strength based, trauma-informed perspective, and added: "*a lot of focus, for me, is around personal development and well-being, and connecting the youth to additional services if that's what they're looking for… Creating that sense of trust and like, working to meet the youth where they're at is super important to me."* This kind of approach, where the navigator is a supportive adult in the lives of youth, allows the youth to ask for what they need on a personal level, facilitating that connection to resources they may not have been aware of. Along the lines of creating safe, welcoming spaces, Participant 6A discussed recreation allowing youth to have healthier, happier lives which encourage improvements in physical, mental, and cognitive health. This eventually has the capacity to help youth with decision making around their desired futures.

From conversations with staff, it can be said with confidence that most people who work closely with their clients/patrons/participants, strive to create a sense of empowerment, trust, and comfort among the youth they are supporting. Staff made above and beyond attempts to identify and meet the needs of the people they were supporting, sometimes having to work around loopholes and obstacles to deliver support. Despite budget constraints, staff who have been afforded time and flexibility to plan their programming, often take into consideration informal feedback from their participants and try to incorporate components that are directly helpful.

However, organizations have been open about discussing some of the challenges they face with supporting youth, both within their organizational structure, and limits imposed by constraints such as funding and staffing. Some of the areas that these staff participants have noticed, but have not been able to provide support with, are discussed below.

6.2 Recognizing Gaps that are Out of the Scope of These Organizations

Despite organizations doing their best to support youth, youth often face a multitude of barriers that impact their ability to receive these services. These barriers are often specific to the individual, and beyond the scope of the organization to accommodate. While primary and secondary supports have been discussed in detail in the previous sections, for the purpose of this thesis, I will consider these 'capacity development' aspects of youth support to be 'tertiary' barriers - those that need to be met before youth can utilize primary and secondary services. Staff participants were asked to discuss some of the barriers youth have presented that required additional support.

With direct food support, one such barrier that has come up with both staff and youth participants is stigma or shame, or a hesitation around receiving support. Participant 1C, who works closely with youth, addressed this: "*I think teenagers have so much pride, I think, you know, they're in that stage of identity formation, that they have so much pride that asking for help, recognizing that you need help is so hard to do."* Participant 3A empathized with how the patrons at their soup kitchen feel, and said they try to maintain an attitude of friendliness, while ensuring each person is treated with respect and dignity. Participant 3A talked about further strategies to normalize visiting their facility, including community wide invitations on holidays such as Thanksgiving. Participant 9A, with a food bank, echoed this practice of creating a safe and welcoming space. They mentioned that despite this, they have seen some challenges with volunteer behavior, and seeks to have greater conversations around this in future meetings, especially in light of the dignified food access campaign.

The Dignified Food Access is a project that has been undertaken by a local non-profit organization to encourage respect and trust, care and empathy, and non-judgmental support within food support infrastructures. The handbook (Roots to Harvest, 2021) has been shared widely within the community. It might be interesting to note that while respect and dignity is a very important factor to make an individual feel good about receiving support, it does not specifically target the source of stigma. An improved experience at the food service organizations might make youth more comfortable and willing to go there and access support, but this does not eliminate the feeling of shame that stems from thoughts on how other people perceive them, especially people in their personal, professional, and social circles who are not a part of the food access system. In order to normalize food access and completely de-stigmatize taking support, education for the staff and volunteers is not enough. The public, especially youth need to be educated and made aware how prominent the challenge of food security is in society, that anyone can be impacted by it, and an environment created where youth do not fear being teased or shamed by their friends for needing support with food. Although a challenging endeavour, such education can begin at school through information and volunteering, as one of the youth participants had suggested.

Another way to create a feeling of dignity and safety in food access might be by employing people with similar experiences in the planning and delivering of programs, who have a higher capacity to empathize with recipients. This is something that could

be helpful, especially for the youth participants who felt patronized by the treatment they received at food access locations. Participant 1A acknowledged this when they shared their experience packaging and distributing the Emergency Food Bags. They said they drew on their own experiences of accessing food support programs, and tried to think about what they or their children would have liked to receive in these bags. They said: "*and I use that sort of to steer my decisions… Our purchasing was intentional, it wasn't a donation… like we sought out the products, we sought out the fresh produce, like that was part of the process.*"

Tied into the dignity aspect of food access is also the requirement of identification documents to access food. While some soup kitchens do not require identification, most food banks in Thunder Bay do. This is a major barrier for some youth, especially for those who do not have an address, have difficulties paying for the documents, or lack the basic information needed to obtain them. Despite this, food banks are accountable to higher-up organizations who require collection of this data, and Participant 9A said making changes around this might not be an easy task. Participant 1A talked about the challenges this presents with supporting youth, because of the very real and complicated barriers they have to navigate to access resources essential to their livelihoods. This participant points out that while having the capacity to help with some of these secondary barriers, they are also limited to how many people they can help, and to what extent. On top of that, there are few other organizations who do similar levels of support, and while it may be argued that support does exist for people, it is also true that the service can only reach a limited number.

Participant 9A, who is involved with a food bank, agreed that some of the requirements do prove challenging for food bank recipients. They shared that they never turn people away and try to find alternative ways for record-keeping. Throughout this conversation, this participant wondered if they had indeed been missing out on some of their patrons because of these requirements. Other than identification, they also brought up that their hours of service, which fall on weekdays, may present a barrier for people attending school or work. They mentioned that while they tried to help people without homes with ready-to-eat food and can openers, there was not much they could do beyond that. It is promising to hear the staff participants consider their established systems in a new light, and consider that while the system has been working well for their regular patrons, there may be a demographic of people who are facing barriers to access.

The quality of food at charitable organizations has been brought up by youth, and this was discussed with staff participants. A large amount of donations that go to food banks and soup kitchens are sourced from grocery stores, during the last few days of their shelf life. Some of them get used by soup kitchens, and the rest are for people to take home. Participant 3B addressed this, saying they would often get calls for donations of products that are close to their best-before dates, and they are always happy to distribute them for people to use last-minute. Participant 3A said they wished they could have a poster or some sort of informational material to give out, with instructions around how long products can be used after the date on the packaging, so people would be less discouraged to accept them. They added: "*just make people aware that we*

wouldn't give out anything that's not good." Participant 9A said that storing milk and bread in the freezer was common, since the food bank ran once every two weeks. However, the patrons were not actively made aware of this, and to them, the passed best-before date meant the food was already bad.

It is clear that there is a gap in understanding between food service organizations and their patrons around what is good to use, and what is not. There also seems to be a lack of trust in these organizations if patrons believe they are being provided with food that is not edible. It is important to address this issue because simply offering the food is not helpful if it is not being received well. Providing information on how long food lasts beyond the best-before date, and how to use the food to make something nutritious, should be a focus of organizations providing skill development support. In addition to teaching youth fun skills such as baking cookies and exploring international foods, it might be beneficial to design programs around using basic pantry ingredients such as lentils, dry beans, frozen and canned goods etc. that participants are more likely to have regular access to.

When it comes to such cooking skills programs, staff participants identified some barriers that youth come with, which are difficult to solve. Participant 1C shared an experience where youth rejected fresh potatoes that were given to them from a farm, because of a lack of facilities to be able to process and prepare the food at home. Participant 1E mentioned that youth may lose interest in recipes that are too elaborate, or may find them not accessible. They also said that being in a space and cooking together often allow participants to share their own experiences with cooking, and providing a safe space often encourages youth to disclose the resource inadequacies they have. These barriers can sometimes be addressed by organizations who can provide more one-on-one interactions, and have appropriate staff and resources to take this on. Participant 1C said they noticed that support of this type was a need with their participants, and subsequently filled that need by hiring a community navigator.

While this organization has been known to provide wrap-around support, such as accommodations around mental health needs that prevent youth from attending their programs, this may not be something most other organizations have the capacity for. Support persons can often only help youth to a certain extent, such as providing information and maybe even transport to physically access resources, but this is done under the assumption that having sufficient knowledge of resources allow youth to seek them out. In reality, the 'tertiary' barriers around having skills and the capacity to fill out forms, following up on appointments, asking necessary questions, and taking the steps to make progress in their areas of need may be things the youth are responsible for doing themselves, and organizations cannot simply make it happen.

When asked to identify barriers to accessing support services, Participant 1C discussed a number of issues that many of the youth participants had also mentioned, including transportation and identification documents. This participant touched on some of these tertiary barriers as well, such as the fact that youth don't generally have their own money, or when they do, they may lack the financial literacy skills to plan and budget.

Another barrier was learned behaviour from families, and if the parents/guardians in the youths' lives were not adept at food access and seeking resources, youth may not know how to do it for themselves. These are barriers that need education and practice to overcome, and unless an organization is solely dedicated to long-term support, can be hard to follow through.

Sometimes barriers come from childhood trauma, and youth may not have the capacity to overcome them on their own. This was addressed by Participant 4A, who said childhood disruptions could leave youth unprepared to take care of themselves. An example could be a struggling caregiver who could not meet basic needs, or could not model behaviour that leads to acquiring skills and seeking out opportunities. Participant 6A mentioned they had plans to partner with a local clinic which would enable them to bring mental health services to their participants. However, addressing these challenges and connecting youth with support simply may not be enough to encourage youth to participate. Participant 1C discussed the challenges of providing appropriate support based on the youths' level of need, for various personal reasons that prevent youth from being fully receptive. One of them could be that even though services are available, and youth are actively being connected, they may not be willing to receive the support because they are not ready to take on the initiative. This participant recognized that there is a fine line between hand-holding, or support which is too involved, and empowering youth to become self-sufficient, and sometimes it takes longer to achieve the latter.

Participant 1C presented a number of barriers they have observed at the community and systems level, which youth struggle with, and secondary support organizations cannot directly help with: *"sometimes it's limitations in the community, like what they need isn't available for them, like housing, or, you know, like addiction treatment or transitional programs, like they just don't exist… Like finding food is the easy part. Like, here's a gift card. But finding, like making a long-term change… So that's employment. And that's education, right. And that's treatment, or counseling, or housing, like those are the things that need to happen."* Participant 1E discussed similar difficulties that they faced with youth support: "*we had one youth that was in the cycle this summer, where he was incarcerated, and trying to get out of that cycle, but he couldn't get a job because he didn't have a place and he couldn't get a place because he didn't have a job. And so, it's like, these different barriers that are like complex, but also, you know, maybe attributed to, yeah, social standings, and social, like, perception, of certain youth*."

Consistency with programming, leading to formation of trusting relationships with peers and staff, could encourage personal development for youth. This was identified as a barrier with the short-term nature of some programs, not allowing participants to receive consistent support. Participant 1B addressed that it was challenging to stay connected with the youth through communication channels while they were in the program, which became even more difficult when they moved on and were not attending in person. Their organization addressed this issue by creating follow up programs that allowed participants to stay directly involved for up to a year after the main program was over,

and continue to check-in on their participants years after they have left. However, Participant 1C also recognized that these programs are successful because of the individualized nature of attention, and would not recommend expanding their capacity beyond what they currently have. Lack of consistent staffing also plays a part in this loss of connection, since once a staff member moves on, their participants also drift apart from the organization.

These conversations reflect and reinforce the notion that supporting youth in food security is not a solitary task, but it has several interconnected aspects, and food security is very much a part of having security in other basic needs of youths' lives. It is also clear that while there is no shortage of effort on the part of organizations, sometimes one organization alone does not have the capacity to support a youth in all these different needs. On top of that, organizations are limited in how much they can do for the youth, and there needs to be a balance between supporting youth to receive help and empowering them to advocate for themselves going forward. This empowerment can happen in many different ways, through education, self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem development, and mental health support, being only a few to name.

A large focus of these support organizations is to make accessing resources easier for youth, and to provide them with skills to attain a sustainable livelihood. Although only one of the organizations formally uses the model, at least some aspects of this is clearly reflected in the values and goals of all other organizations. So far, we had discussed the successes and challenges to providing the necessary support to all youth in general in Thunder Bay. However, it cannot be ignored that a large demographic of youth who live here come from Indigenous backgrounds, and have unique experiences in terms of upbringing, traditions, culture, and in the context of being in the city, a lack of connection and often discrimination. In the next section, staff participants were asked to reflect on their experience providing support to Indigenous youth, and in what ways they have or have not been able to meet the specific needs these youth have.

6.3 Thoughts on Cultural Programming

Staff participants were asked to reflect on the demographic of youth they work with, and to discuss how the range of support they provide respects and acknowledges cultural needs of their participants. Participant 1E recognized there is a high presence of Indigenous youth in their programs because of the geographical location of Thunder Bay, and a number of these youth may have experiences with integrative generational trauma or different barriers in that realm. This participant shared some insights from their work with adult program participants, and discussed how difficult it must be for them to have to adapt to a life of western, institutional education.

When it came to Indigenous led organizations, only one was interviewed for this research. Participant 8A mentioned that they performed feasts every season and a version of the traditional Powwow at various school locations, as part of an immersive culture week. They also worked with families with children up to two years old, and with older youth at schools, through nine different locations in Thunder Bay. Participant 8A

explained the goal of their organization: "*what we're trying to do is return culture to them. And we're starting at the earliest ages possible with the youth… But sometimes what we see is that the parents are being introduced the same time*." The participant made a good point about connection to culture; it was the youth who had grown up learning about and being a part of their culture, be it Indigenous, European or Middle Eastern, were the ones who expressed a greater importance of culture in their lives, and wanted to seek it out as adults.

There were programs that were more intense, like the hide tanning workshops that were done through a specialized class at one of the high schools. It consisted of all Indigenous students, and Indigenous facilitators were brought in to lead the activities. This program provided long-term consistency, as it took place over two academic semesters with the same group of students. Participant 7A discussed a moose hunt they had once been a part of, where they trained 15 Indigenous youth in the traditional practice. This program involved training and certifications, and had the youth fully prepared for an immersive experience. The participant discussed how important connection and belonging is for youth and how programs like these provide purpose, meaning and value in the youths' lives:

> "*Most of them all graduated. Because it gave them such an incentive to do something with it… They were armed with so many different things. To have a young person shoot a partridge in the fall. Our girls, our girls fed our camp, yeah, with partridge, with fish… They went fishing, they outfished the Elders. You know, and if we're able to recruit programs like that, for kids, even now in schools, the turnaround would be 100%... We tend to forget how connected we are. But if we're able to go back to that, and still get our degrees in law, or any degree, because our Elders have always said, education is key. Education, again, it's not just about being better, it's about just being more aware. Because it's that awareness that creates that, that ability to gain wisdom, so we can share that knowledge.*"

Although there has been no such program since then, Participant 7A believed that this kind of programming holds a lot of value, and if executed properly would be extremely beneficial to the youth. Even at a smaller scale, teachings around certain important components of culture could also be valuable, if more elaborate programs are not possible. A tendency to modify programs that better appeal to youth in the city has been seen with some programs, and Participant 7A, who is an Indigenous Elder, spoke about making geese sausages, and a variation of chicken fried rice with wild duck - things that they considered a compromise to make it more familiar and balanced for the urban Indigenous youth.

Culture specific programming has been rare outside of the school setting, and only two organizations in this study attempted such programming to a significant degree. A major reason for this is that organizations that are not Indigenous-led, or do not have Indigenous program staff in their ranks, do not feel qualified or comfortable attempting to share those teachings. Participant 1D elaborated on what it looks like to partner with

other organizations to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their programming. This included creation of culturally appropriate food bags for Indigenous Elders during COVID-19, co-facilitate Indigenous programming by contributing resources and materials, and focusing on an exchange of knowledge and skills when working with Indigenous youth, rather than one-sided teaching. Participant 6A also discussed partnering with Elders to bring cultural programs to their participants. Again, the participant expressed a hesitation around running such programs as a non-Indigenous organization, and felt it more appropriate when Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers took the lead: "*it's more just out of respect, we don't want to teach it in the wrong way. We want to be able to honor those traditions, and learn those traditions.*"

One of the participants with a community kitchen program mentioned traditional foods do not make up a large part of their programming; they let the youth choose recipes from a basic shelf cookbook, and usually decide on comfort foods such as pizza and pasta. A lack of traditional cooking is common with a lot of organizations, since wild meats need special permits to be served. When it comes to direct food support organizations, Participant 3B mentioned they would need a completely separate station to process such meats, which they do not have the capacity for, and would be more than happy to serve if someone donated it processed and cooked. Participant 9A said they have been receiving whole fish and farmed bison for their bi-weekly distributions, which many of their patrons enjoy.

Serving wild meats is actually possible in food banks, an example has been set by the Sudbury wild food bank. Avoiding the process of preparing or cooking the meat to stay within regulations, this food bank receives butchered, cut, and wrapped meat from local hunters as well as confiscated meat from the Ministry of Natural Resources (Alamenciak, 2015). Patrons are able to pick up the meat as they would at any food bank. While this is a promising model, it will take massive initiative, connections, and collaboration to implement this in Thunder Bay, and will require resources and dedicated staff to do so.

Refugees from Muslim countries is another demographic who have been frequenting direct food support organizations, and although buying and preparing food while maintaining Halal standards is something soup kitchens have not been able to undertake yet, they still provide options for Muslim patrons in the form of fresh produce from food rescue, and drinks and desserts. Meanwhile at the food bank, they have recently started the option to receive Halal meat once a month. Other than Indigenous and Muslim, no other cultural needs have been challenging to navigate in this research.

Much like with the above section, scope and capacity of organizations again play into the extent of services that can be provided to the youth. In truth, appropriate cultural teachings can only be provided by Indigenous teachers and knowledge keepers who are well versed in traditional and cultural practices. Non-Indigenous organizations are trying to be supportive in collaboration, and have worked to create safe, respectful, and collaborative spaces to hold these events. Based on the interviews with youth participants, what they desire is more connection to people who can guide and teach

them, and non-Indigenous organizations can play a role here to bridge that gap, connect youth with appropriate persons to provide them with this connection. They also hold the expertise to support Indigenous organizations in securing grants, gathering supplies, and designing and delivering long-term immersive programs using models of similar programs they have seen success with. Collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, building on the strengths and resources of each other, could lead to consistent and long-term programs that are true to culture. This could have a significant impact on the youth.

6.4 Challenges to Providing Support

So far, it has been clear that many of the barriers to access presented by youth participants have been acknowledged, and to an extent addressed, by staff participants playing various roles at support organizations. It has also been discussed that there are some barriers that organizations cannot support. This section will explore some of the challenges and limitations organizations face, which prevent them from providing the support they deem necessary for the youth they work with.

Four resource barriers have been discussed in the following. These are the resources staff participants most focused on when asked about their operational challenges.

6.4.1 Youth Recruitment for Various Programs

Youth engagement was an important area to focus on because strategies around this dictates the target demographic organizations work with. This can be considered the first line of intervention, because those participants who have the opportunity to connect to various programs and services are usually the ones who receive these supports. To gauge an understanding of the reach of these organizations, staff participants were asked to comment on their recruitment strategies.

Community kitchens are held in neighbourhood locations and are often limited to the people who live in those areas. Despite these programs running from within the neighbourhood complexes, attendance is sometimes low. Although there is not significant outreach, other organizations working with similar demographics often refer participants to this program and vice versa, and inter-relations between various organizations within the community often fill some of the gaps in reaching target. Another organization which was interviewed also relied on partner organizations for participant recruitment, and included a self-referral aspect making it easier for youth to directly reach out. However, sometimes registration involves paperwork, and in some cases an online account. Although this process has been streamlined, participants without a device or access to the internet, without an email address, or those who are not tech-savvy, may find this to be difficult to navigate.

Some of the organizations working with youth under 16 would require a guardian’s permission to attend programming, and often miss out on participants when this is not achievable. It appears that these kinds of programs may need to extend their outreach

to parents as well, and find strategies to generate interest among parents. One of the strategies this organization employed was a community dinner; however, door-to-door flyers, menus for the week, take home meal incentives, and highlighting skills development are all strategies discussed with staff participants which could encourage parents/guardians to send their youth. Another way for people to hear about programs from various organizations is through social media, and nearly half the organizations interviewed use platforms such as Facebook. This is a good strategy, and falls in line with what some of the youth participants had wished more organizations did.

Extensive outreach has been used as a recruitment strategy by a neighbourhood based recreational organization, who have been trying to get more information about their programming out there. Unlike other organizations who are limited by funds and space, this organization is government funded, has their own building space, and is able to accommodate more youth. Aside from mailbox flyers, they have been asking schools to inform students about this program, and also trying to partner with other community-based organizations for more referrals. They have also been speculating whether to expand their outreach beyond their immediate neighborhood, and said transportation on the part of the participants, and staff availability to physically do that outreach, may be barriers.

Participant 6A, with this organization, brought up transportation as a barrier for their youth, which often leads to lower attendance at their events. They suggested that this is where partner organizations could step in. While they do need special insurance and legalities to be able to drive youth, some organizations in the community are already providing these services. This is mostly focused around getting youth to their appointments or resource access locations, delivering essentials to them, and other life needs; however, this could also be a means to reach out to a group of youth these organizations already work with, and introduce them to a new program. Collaboration between these organizations could ensure greater access for youth to programs outside of the organizations they are directly connected with.

Primary support programs have not discussed their advertisement strategies, but the two organizations interviewed are prominent in the city and most people are aware of them. Smaller direct support, working out of churches for example, were often mentioned by some youth while others did not know about them. For those organizations, greater outreach may be necessary. At schools, staff often find creative ways to invite students to access the Breakfast Program. Participant 5A said they play music before the start of school, to draw students to where food is being served: "*they dance down the hallway, the staff come and dance like it's, it's engaging, and it makes it fun. And it also creates a welcoming thing. Because then there's no shame or stigma."* This is an important consideration especially in a school setting, where youth may be self-conscious around accessing food. Taking the focus away from the need aspect, and focusing more on creating curiosity and fun is a good way to appeal to youth.

Some of the organizations mentioned that participants have the option to get volunteer hours from helping out, which being a component of their high school graduation

requirement, might be another incentive for youth to participate. Soup kitchens are great weekend volunteer options for youth, where they can be involved in the kitchen, learn from the staff who work there, and receive a hot meal that they helped cook. This is particularly noticeable in the attitude of youth, when they receive food as a reward for helping cook and serve over 200 people, as opposed to standing in line to receive food. Some youth have mentioned that they only feel good eating food when they have paid for it, and the same sentiment can be seen when youth think of the food not as a handout, but rather something they have earned.

One of the organizations that prioritize long-term consistency in their programming usually hold structured programming over a period of time, and recruit their youth through paid employment and in some cases school credits. There is less self-enrollment in this organization, and participants are usually referred through other organizations they are already connected with. This organization also does outreach through their programs in high school classrooms, as a means of informing youth of these opportunities, and also as a way to hand-pick youth who seem to need these programs most. Since there is accountability for youth to attend programming, and potential loss of pay or loss of credit if they do not, this encourages youth to stick to their routine once established, and promote the capacity to receive consistent support.

While most other organizations have been found to rely on an interest of the youth to attend the programming, youth who lack motivation, are shy, or do not feel comfortable seeking out services may not find sufficient incentive to regularly attend. It has been observed over the course of this research, that when it comes to programming around learning and skills development, programs run best when they are brought to the youth, or the youth have an incentive to be there. These organizations have already employed various creative means to engage youth, but it might also be helpful to gather insight from their target demographics, to identify and strategically remove barriers that disrupt access. It is important to consider that youth who do not have any existing connections or positive experiences with support may be hesitant to join, but in fact those are the youth who could potentially benefit most from these programs.

6.4.2 Evaluation

Evaluation is a necessary step in any level of programming, not only because it highlights the successes and challenges of programs, but it also produces observations that lead to improvements. This may be the primary method for organizations to understand how their programs are being received, and whether they are meeting their intended goals. While some organizations said they conducted formal evaluations for some of their programs, this was mostly done for the purpose of reporting to funding organizations. Feedback that resulted in changes to the program mostly happened through informal evaluations, or conversations with frontline staff members.

Although there is no formal evaluation done on the breakfast program, Participant 5A often received informal feedback from students, discussing what they liked or did not like about the food that was presented. Participant 3B, from the soup kitchen, said their

menus are often inspired by what the patrons talk about wanting to eat, and Participant 9A, from the food bank, mentioned that based on what they observe patrons taking out of the food bags, they adjust their requests to RFDA. Participant 2A mentioned the youth participating in community kitchens enjoyed the simple recipes they could recreate at home. Participant 6A received similar feedback from parents, saying youth felt more confident in the kitchen after their virtual cooking programs, and using the recipes provided, made meals for their families. This goes on to show that interest can be generated when the task at hand is simple enough that it does not appear daunting, which is what one of the youth participants had expressed a concern about.

One thing to note about the feedback discussed so far, is that it is primarily positive and often comes from parents who are happy that their children are learning new skills. However, constructive feedback around what needs improvement, such as thoughts around making the programs more engaging, further skills youth may want to learn, and basic input to improve the quality of programming, would be beneficial. Participant 6A mentioned that even though there is no formal evaluation in place yet, this is something that they want to implement in order to generate new ideas with direct input from the youth. A few of the participants had mentioned that they sometimes had difficulties with filling spots in the programs, and it might be worthwhile to investigate what changes or recruitment tactics would generate an interest among youth who are not attending.

However, developing a formal process of evaluation will take time and effort, in terms of creating an engaging questionnaire, distributing it to participants, and analyzing the results. Participant 1B mentioned that evaluations, surveys, and collecting feedback is often a difficult process. Unless participants do it during program time, there is often no guarantee that youth would take the time to do them at home. Paperwork is generally considered boring and if it feels like school, youth do not want to participate. One of the organizations has found creative ways to get participant feedback through games and check-in/check-out activities, which often reveal much about what participants think and feel. An example of this is the heads, hands, and hearts activity, where youth share their thoughts about a piece of knowledge they earned, a skill they acquired, and an emotion they felt during the program.

It appears that programs are running smoothly with the current model of informal feedback, and making significant changes to accommodate more people may not be within the capacity of organizations with limited resources. Most organizations do not seem to really struggle with the number of their participants, or have an intention to largely expand beyond their current operations. However, barriers do exist for youth which prevent some of them from taking advantage of these programs, and organizations should make an effort to include those youth who are either not fully benefiting from the programs, or are unable to attend at all. Some sort of evaluation around participants needing additional support or accommodation, would allow organizations to plan ahead and ensure those needs are being met. Organizations will have to spend resources to create, execute, and maintain a formal evaluation procedure, and this could be an investment that substantially improves the quality of support they provide.

6.4.3 Funding

Just as money is one of the most significant barriers for youth in accessing food support, funding can also be considered as one of the biggest barriers for organizations who provide support. In this research it was found that some of the more financially secure organizations were direct food support organizations, which obtained money from the Red Cross, United Way, or corporate or private donations. These organizations also received support from the federal government during the pandemic. Among secondary support, one of the programs interviewed was a federally funded 5-year project that was developed as the result of an inquest. Another one of the programs was city funded, and did not require any external funds from grants.

Most of the non-profits and charitable organizations were responsible for securing their own money through donations, grant applications, and various external fundraising initiatives. Three out of the eight organizations in this study usually secured their own funds through government and non-government sources. Some of the grants they have are time-bound, requiring them to secure new funds to continue running programs. This was a common theme with non-profits, and they are forced to spend a lot of time on funding applications/reports that would be better spent on programming.

Participant 8A pointed out that while all non-profits have to struggle for funding, the challenge is worse for some than for others. This participant, who had worked in management level positions in other non-Indigenous organizations previously, and is currently working with an Indigenous-led organization, has observed a stark difference in government funds allocations: "*but I don't know what that is, it looks like racism to me, like when you're looking at systemic racism, I don't know how you can call it anything else than that, because there's just no way you can do business, and do what we're trying to do with, with the ridiculous amount of funding that we receive*". This organization has suffered extensively as a result of limited funding, to the point where despite building relationships with partner organizations, they have not been able to provide programming due to a shortage of staff. During the pandemic, they were unable to support their members because they lost access to the funds that they had expected to receive.

They went on to express their displeasure with how provincial funding is allocated, and how the amount of funding they receive did not even allow them to uphold the requirements of their contact: "*but it's still in the contract saying that we better provide nutritious, traditional nutritious meals for kids. We're nowhere in the ballpark for getting the kind of money that we need to provide nutritious meals. And if you add to it nutritious, traditional meals, I mean, come on, we're buying processed stuff, we're doing the best we can.*" The participant described that the lunch program largely relies on whole wheat bread, processed peanut butter, jelly, and the same luncheon meat every day.

While having experienced staff may be an advantage when it comes to grant-writing and securing funds, at the Indigenous organization, the staff shortage forces Participant

8A to perform various logistical duties. This includes solving problems with IT, or undergoing training and certifications that would allow the organization to continue operations, and takes their time away from higher level tasks. Staff retention has been a major issue with this organization, largely due to their unreliable funding. This participant further stated that the level of work that is required is high and the pay that they are able to provide is low, and they do not seem to be able to find a way around it other than greater government recognition and support:

> "*You know, and then the other thing is, is that I find that amazingly, systemically racist, is that we sit there, and we beg people to work here and say, well, look, you know, you obviously, you know, care about Indigenous kids, right. And you are Indigenous. So, you know, and this is what we should be saying, if we're honest. So, we're asking you to take a vow of poverty so that you can return culture to your children, because that's what we're paying. We're paying poverty wages, right? That's not acceptable. You know, if Truth and Reconciliation were, were being honest, they would come back and they would fund our youth outreach workers just about at the same level as regular school teachers, because it's that important, and that's the message that should be being sent is that Indigenous culture is every bit as important as European culture.*"

In speaking with the other non-profit, non-Indigenous organization, who also mostly relied on securing grants to run their operations, it was clear that their success has been built upon years of experience. This has resulted in hiring staff who are experts in discovering sources of funds and writing targeted grant proposals, determined networking with funding organizations and donors within the community, and a large amount of creative, out of the box thinking. One of the successes of this organization has been to have multiple people on their staff who have been able to design and deliver programs that met both funding requirements as well as the values of the organization. Participant 1B discussed that most programs run through a collaboration of different grants, and they would often have to apply to several sources to secure sufficient money to cover all the aspects of a program. They also had to remain vigilant on funding parameters, and if any participant did not fit the eligibility criteria, they would have to seek out other sources for them. They also need to make sure they track the progress of their programs in specific ways in order to follow through with their funders. Participant 1B said: "*it's always a game of like piecing those things together.*"

Participant 1C laid out the various sources they were able to reach to secure sufficient funds to run their programming: "I *would say the government is about 30% to 35% of the year, right now, federal is higher than all of them. And then that's only because of employment* [Employment and Social Development Canada] *money… Foundations is another one, like the Ontario Trillium Foundation, or the RBC Foundation, there's lots of different foundations. And then another source for us would be like donations and fundraising. Probably more on the like 15%, like with corporate plus, one time plus individual recurring would be a part of it, for sure. And some of it is fee for service, like self-generated… None of it is sustained. Like, we don't have anything longer than a three-year contract at this point with anybody. And they're mostly shorter than that, like*

most of them are year to year." Participant 1C discussed the importance of a few long-term, diversified sources: "*So that, especially when I lose a big funder, or governments change and priorities change, that we're not going under*."

Speaking to these two organizations highlighted the amount of effort non-profits have to put into acquiring funding, in order to run programs and deliver services. Finding money is a skill which has to be developed over many years, and requires resources such as staff time and expertise, knowledge about funding sources, connections with other organizations, record-keeping and showcasing successes, and continuously creating new programming that fits with funding requirements. For organizations that are new to this venture or are understaffed, this may be a challenge. Moreover, the lack of money to have dedicated staff and resources might be a barrier itself to securing more funding, as was seen with one of the organizations. Perhaps collaboration between various non-profits could promote knowledge exchange, and more successful organizations would be able to share what they have learned to support others to get their feet off the ground.

6.4.4 Staffing

Another major aspect of providing support is the availability of reliable, consistent, and capable staff, to not only design and deliver programs, but for the smooth operation of the organization itself. Some of the barriers that come from an inadequacy in this area has been seen in the previous section, and will be discussed here in greater detail.

Most of the organizations interviewed have a small staff team, and within that team, an even smaller group of staff are responsible for individual programs. Participant 4A discussed the large number of youth each facilitator is often in charge of, and that having a capacity to maintain communication is a key aspect in providing support. Their program initially had two navigators; however, seeing this need for extended personal interactions, two more staff were hired, which has caused a significant improvement.

With a larger number of staff, it may be possible to allocate each person more time for planning and designing of their programs prior to delivery. The planning aspect and creative approaches to program delivery has been found to be important with almost all of the organizations spoken with. For the School Breakfast Program, having a couple of dedicated staff members helped with thorough planning of everything from shopping to prepping to fundraising. Participant 5A mentioned that this program was important to them for personal reasons, and they have gone above and beyond to create interesting meals within their budget to keep the program going as long as possible and for as many students as possible.

On the other hand, Participant 8A explained that their staffing is directly affected by their lack of funding, preventing them from running programs at a high school location altogether. They have had high turnover rates, as well as positions that have been vacant for long periods of time, due to the low wages that they have to offer. The participant also talked about uncertainties in staff retention, where permanent positions

could not be hired for, because it could not be guaranteed the funding would remain or get renewed the following year. Aside from the resources spent on training and orientation to get a new staff person on board, it is also difficult when staff do not get the opportunity to grow with the organization, and organizations as well as the youth participants miss out on benefiting from the skills that seasoned staff could develop through familiarity and expertise with the programs.

Participant 1C, whose non-profit organization has been able to offer perks such as benefits and paid holidays, found difficulties with staff for different reasons. They have found that the work they offer is often a first job for recent graduates, and they tend to move on to other positions, or even higher education, after a few years of experience. Being a small organization, there is also no ladder to climb for the staff, and there is no visible growth among the ranks that is often attractive to employees. This organization mainly works with youth, and many of their staff members are in their 20s to early 30s. While being closer in age to their participants provides a massive advantage in being able to connect to their daily lives and habits, it also provides this challenge of a high turnover rate. This organization has adapted to this by creating program facilitation guides to easily orient new staff members, and have made improvements to their salaries and benefits as much as is possible within their non-profit budgets.

Staff is perhaps one of the most important resources an organization can have, second only to money. Frontline staff are the direct line of connection between the resources offered and the youth who are being supported. It is important not only to hire staff who are dedicated and capable, but also to provide them with the time and resources to perform at their full capacity. Staff turnover is a reality, and within this limitation, organizations need to adapt to create programs and services that still work well. Finding ways to retain a few seasoned staff who can supervise and guide the newcomers may be beneficial. In addition, various funding sources that allow organizations to pay for their staffing could be investigated.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This study was structured in a way that allowed me to create a flow of information in the following order:

Youth Participants	Staff Participants
What kind of food do youth regularly eat and what dictates this eating pattern	Recognizing the needs of youth in the community and providing relevant support
What kind of food would youth rather eat	Recognizing which needs are beyond the scope of the organization
What gets in the way of eating the food that they prefer	Extent of focus on cultural needs
How do food skills impact their eating habits	The various barriers that organizations face and what they need to better support youth
How can youth be better supported	

Even with a small sample size of 23 youth, it was apparent that food situations in the lives of youth can be extremely diverse and individualistic, depending on not only the socio-economic situation of each person, but also their past experiences, personality, beliefs, and priorities. For example, among youth who were making an income, some cooked at home, some preferred to eat homemade food made by a household member, some ate takeout due to a lack of skills, and some ate takeout because they had no time to make food at home. Among those who were not making an income, some chose to access food banks and cook at home, some ate at soup kitchens, and some relied heavily on support from social service workers or friends and family. This observation that despite having access to a set of basic resources, youth were interacting with them differently, calls for the need to look deeper into the individual needs of the youth in order to be able to better understand their eating behaviour.

Another observation made from this research pertains to the FAO definition of food security, as it applies to the youth. Because of the diverse nature of needs, food security can often only be partially achieved by youth, with all the components of the definition not being met. For example, this research has found that youth may have physical and economic access to sufficient food but may not feel safe accessing it, nor is that food always nutritious. In addition, some youth struggle with making ends meet, and the food they do have access to may meet their dietary needs but may not meet their preferences. Hamelin et al. (2011) discussed the importance of eating food that tastes and feels good, but youth who are reliant on charitable meal programs may not have

that aspect of choice. In addition, food support programs are often associated with stigma, shame, and a loss of dignity, which may further prevent youth from accessing them to meet their food security needs (Bowen & Irish, 2017). While this has been found to be true in the case of Thunder Bay youth as well, initiatives such as the Dignified Food Access campaign and ground level efforts by organizations are progressive steps towards improvement.

Food insecurity can manifest in various physical and mental health challenges for youth, as well as impact behaviour (Toombs et al., 2020; Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). Interestingly, the risky behaviour observed by Tarasuk et. al (2008) around the most common methods of food acquisition among homeless youth, were not observed in this research. One reason for this could have been that only a few of the youth interviewed were in unstable housing, and all of them accessed direct food support. Another reason could be the strong network of food support organizations servicing the city, and their intra-organizational partnerships, which allow them to access a majority of youth who need support. Due to the parameters of the sample size, each youth had some level of connection to a primary or a secondary support service, and the behaviour of youth in more desperate situations were not investigated. This once again highlights the need for research into the food security and food access barriers for youth, especially ones who are not supported in any way.

Research has shown that families in a higher socio-economic bracket tend to have more balanced, nutritional, and healthy diets (Azagba & Sharaf, 2011). In this research, it was found that families who have resources such as reliable income, housing, transportation, and food literacy generally ate more well-rounded meals. However, the youth who did not have such balanced diets were those who lived alone and lacked food skills, regardless of their socio-economic status. It can be concluded that while income is one of the biggest factors in achieving food security, having income alone cannot guarantee a healthy and secure dietary pattern. Food literacy, and an ability to manage ones eating habits, also plays an important role in food security.

Other than income and food skills, this research identified food cost and access to cooking facilities as major barriers that prevent youth from eating their preferred foods. Although Hamelin et al. (2011) had discussed rent and mortgage to be competing factors with food budget, paying rent was not brought up as a factor as much as having suitable housing with a functioning kitchen. Those who did not have stable housing were not able to cook preferred foods at all, and those who did, presented various barriers within their homes that limited their cooking. Transportation was brought up as a barrier by many youth, coinciding with the findings by Thayer et al. (2021) that families with reliable transportation had greater access to a diversity of healthy and inexpensive foods. This research highlights the importance of regarding food security as a problem impacted by a number of factors, and research into barriers of food security needs to understand the interconnected nature of these factors, in order to effectively address the problem.

Bowen and Irish (2017) has discussed psychological barriers that youth face when it comes to asking for help, especially around direct support which youth often associate with stigma. It was found in this research that self-image takes a higher priority in youth who are younger, such as teens or youth in early twenties. Older youth, through experience, have adapted to look past their self-image in order to acquire food from support locations. Other barriers identified by Goodman et al. (2019) include lack of trust, comfort, knowledge, and support, or experiences of disrespect and racism that prevent youth from seeking out support. Many of these barriers were brought up by youth in this research, with relation to both primary and secondary supports, and reiterates the notion that supports being in place does not equate to access, but these supports also need to be made accessible.

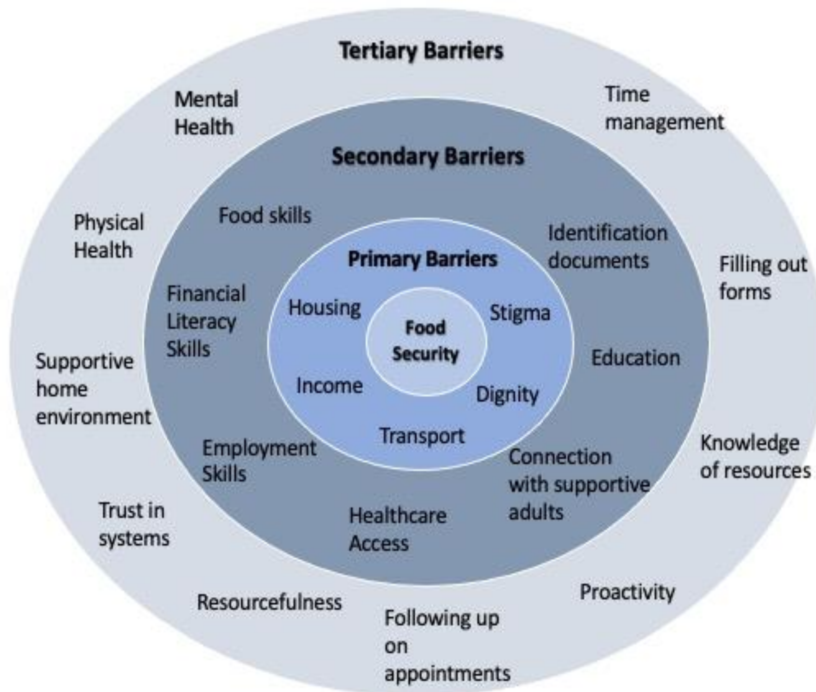
An important part of food security is access to preferred foods, and cultural foods play a role in food preferences for some Indigenous and other people. Power (2008) found that among urban Indigenous youth, there is a lack of interest in traditional foods, often brought about by a lack of connection, lack of time, and a greater preference for market foods. This research has concluded that even though cultural or childhood foods are not a necessity for youth in terms of achieving food security, it is something that is appreciated and often desired. Elders often comment about the disconnect experienced by urban Indigenous youth when they grow up in a Eurocentric environment (Alani-Verjee et al., 2017). However, youth in this research have expressed an interest in connecting with their cultures, and have commented on the lack of resources that exist to facilitate this connection. Youth growing up and adapting to a life in the city will naturally take on the characteristics of their environment, and therefore food security for Indigenous youth needs to include aspects of both traditional and market foods (Elliott et al., 2012). Perhaps more focused research into the goals, strategies, and capacities of support organizations can be conducted, in order to identify ways to incorporate this combined approach to food security into their programming.

In Thunder Bay, a lack of education and employment is more prominent in Indigenous families than in non-Indigenous families, and there is also a high percentage of youth in the Indigenous population of Thunder Bay (Anishnawbe Mushkiki, 2020). As a result, food insecurity is likely to be more prominent in Indigenous youth. However, this research has observed youth from a diversity of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, and identified that food security is a challenge for most low-income families, regardless of ethnicity. This highlights a need for greater effort within the community to identify and address food security needs, which may see greater success through targeted initiatives that are appropriate for youth from diverse backgrounds.

Staff interviews have helped to understand the capacity of various local organizations to provide support. In line with the findings of Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009), Kantor (2001), and Fairholm (1999), food support in Thunder Bay also included community kitchens and gardens, emergency food distribution, education and skill development around food literacy, and programs at schools and neighbourhood locations. In particular, primary food support, operated mostly through donations and charity, form a large part of the city's food scene. Levkoe (2003) had mentioned food banks and soup

kitchens have now become permanent fixtures in the Canadian context, and this sentiment was echoed almost word for word by staff Participant 9A, who works with a local food bank. This again highlights the need for capacity development and food literacy skills for youth, to move them away from short-term support and prepare them to have greater ownership over their food habits.

It was discussed in section 2.2 that food security is not an isolated problem, rather it is part of a multitude of barriers that youth have to navigate in order to achieve a secure lifestyle. Similarly, food insecurity does not only stem from a lack of food, but a combination of several factors impact youths' ability to become food secure. Three levels of such barriers have been identified throughout the conversations in this research, based on the needs of the youth and to what extent organizations had a role to play in meeting those needs. This is graphically presented in Figure 9, in a format adapted from Elliott et al. (2012).



Primary Barriers: Direct barriers to food access
Secondary Barriers: Barriers in utilization, or barriers that indirectly impact food access
Tertiary Barriers: Psychological and individual barriers, that require empowerment and capacity development to overcome

Figure 9: The three layers of barriers to food security as identified from experiences of youth in Thunder Bay

Primary barriers can be thought of as directly impacting an individual's access to food, such as income or employment, transportation, housing, communication methods,

healthcare, and so forth. Direct support organizations can step in and provide short-term support to meet immediate food access needs. Secondary support organizations often help with some of these barriers through advocacy, and long-term one-on-one problem-solving. Primary barriers are more easily observed, and organizations have been seen to prioritize these needs in their clientele.

Secondary barriers can be thought of as obstacles that prevent people from meeting their primary needs. This may include a lack of employment skills to hold a job, a lack of cooking skills to prepare nutritious meals, or a lack of financial literacy to be able to budget and manage expenses. Support organizations focused on skill development have also been observed to focus on these areas of need, with aims to create greater self-reliance and independence among their participants. Supports such as these are discussed extensively in section 2.3, and section 6.1 discusses these supports as they operate in the context of Thunder Bay. It is of note that some secondary barriers, such as access to and availability of housing, securing interviews and employment, and accessing healthcare services have been found to be more of a systematic issue, and support organizations have limited scope and authority.

Youth often face a third layer of barriers, referred to here as tertiary barriers, which are to some extent intangible and have to do with personal development, and can be difficult to address and support. One example of this can be resourcefulness, where it is seen that some of the youth are more proactive about seeking out and accessing resources than others. Another can be mental health, where it may be more difficult for some youth to take initiative and take care of their personal needs. Yet another barrier could be trust in social service systems, which may prevent some youth from seeking out resources. These are barriers that are to some extent internal, in the sense that these are skills, behaviours and personality traits that have developed as a result of the youths' life and experiences. No matter how much a support worker, a teacher or a trusted adult makes an effort to assist youth overcome these barriers, there is a process of unlearning and relearning that has to happen within the individual. This is one aspect of food support for youth that may sometimes get overlooked.

An empowerment approach, as described by Zimmerman (2000) may be employed by organizations in order to support youth with these individual and psychological needs, which includes focusing on youths' strengths, identifying environmental influences that prevent success, and improving capacity rather than solving immediate problems. This approach moves away from the traditional 'hand-holding' method of providing support, and allows the youth to learn from their situations, make decisions around their choices, understand the consequences, and eventually develop the capacity to sustainably meet their needs in the long-term (Zimmerman, 2000). The three areas of personal development through empowerment include how youth understand their personal and sociopolitical relationships (interpersonal), how they use problem solving to meet their needs (interactional), and how they take action to bring about changes in their own lives (behavioral) (Zimmerman, 2000).

Secondary support organizations providing skill development programs could build on

this theory and promote greater personal control in the lives of the youth they support. Working on this kind of capacity building, in a consistent and supportive environment, may allow youth to overcome some of the challenges they have around their tertiary barriers. An interesting component of the interpersonal component of psychological empowerment is sociopolitical control, which "refers to people's beliefs about their skills and capabilities in social and political systems" (Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011, p. 593). This relates to youths' individual competence, efficacy, and mastery (Peterson et al., 2011), which translates to the ability to be resourceful around seeking out support, proactive about taking action, and eventually taking control over their own life's challenges. Another component of this approach is promoting a sense of 'perceived control', which generates a belief in youth that they can manage the outcomes of their efforts, encouraging youth to persist (Zimmerman, 2000).

While psychological empowerment looks different for people in various stages of life, it has been found that involvement in organizations, or structured programming, "provide opportunities for learning new skills, developing a sense of community, building a sense of control and confidence, and improving community life" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 47). Many of the secondary support organizations discussed in this thesis already practice empowerment in their programming, and his approach to self-advocacy in addition to immediate support, adapted by a greater number of organizations reaching a wider population of diverse youth, may allow the community to become more self-reliant in the long run.

The barriers and challenges identified in this research primarily pertain to access to and utilization of food, two of the four pillars of food security, according to the FAO definition (Mc Carthy et al., 2018; Power, 2008). The other two pillars were discussed in lesser detail. Availability was only brought up as an issue in terms of cultural and traditional foods, and it was found that traditional Indigenous foods were hard to find within the city. While youth did not deem traditional foods to be important to their food security, it was still an important part of their preferential diet, and a lack of this food did impact their connection to their roots. Stability of the food systems was not mentioned by anyone as a concern; however, stability of individual food situations was discussed. Youth mentioned that while their current food acquisition methods were safe and reliable, unexpected changes such as job loss, housing loss, or moving to a new neighbourhood could disrupt their food acquisition patterns, leading to instability.

7.1 Recommendations

One of the goals of this thesis was to gather input from both youth and staff participants, to create a discussion around strategies to better support the youth. Some of the recommendations that have come up involve greater education and awareness, the design of secondary support programs, and greater exposure to Indigenous culture. Based on the overall findings in this research, the following recommendations are presented, aimed at improving the experience of receiving food support for youth. These recommendations are directly inspired by the experiences shared by youth and staff participants.

One of the biggest factors discussed by both youth and staff participants was the stigma associated with receiving support. Bowen and Irish (2017) stated that youth may often choose not to access food support, despite having a need for these services. This not only came from a feeling of inadequacy when receiving food, but also from an impact on their self-image and self-esteem. It has been observed through interviews that youth feel more comfortable when they pay for the food they are consuming. Staff participants have recognized income to be a main barrier to food security, echoing the conclusions presented in Feighery et al. (2015). When receiving handouts, youth experience feelings of shame and stigma from being perceived as less than their peers simply because they need to access food, and in some cases may experience teasing or bullying. I discovered that recently, a Dignified Food Access program took place throughout the city, to create a stronger sense of respect and dignity at food support locations. From speaking to youth about their personal experiences, I have come to the conclusion that these teachings should also be extended to those members of society who do not need such services, but may cross paths with those who do. Youth learn behaviours around discrimination, judgement, and respect at an early age, which shape how they hold those values for the rest of their lives. Hence, education and awareness around the needs of food access and food security at schools may be a good starting point.

In line with education and awareness, I identified another aspect of primary support that requires action. Many of the youth had expressed concerns with food past the best-before date being distributed at food support organizations, often believing they were being presented with food that was not edible. On the other hand, staff had described this food as being rescued, which means they were still good to eat, but could not be sold at grocery stores. Youth appear to not have knowledge of where the food comes from at these organizations, and why it was presented to them at such a short notice; they also seem to lack information on how to make the most of these products with a few days to spare. Information packages, posters, or even verbal discussions could be used to better inform people about the usability of packaged foods beyond the best-before dates, as well as proper ways to store certain foods, and recipes to use the food among other things. Based on this gap in communication between organizations and recipients, I suggest that organizations should keep in mind that many families may not have the necessary food skills to properly utilize this food, and support should be given along with the food on how to use them.

Kirkpartick & Tarasuk (2003) had discussed low-income families' behaviour around selective food purchases, and this was observed with conversations with youth participants as well, who purchased little to no fruits and vegetables in their diet and opted for more filling, starchy foods. Brown et al. (2008) and Cidro et al. (2015) have both discussed the low intake of fruits and vegetables in the diets of urban Indigenous youth, due to factors such as cost, lack of preparation skills, and a sense of overwhelm stemming from busy, urban lifestyles. This has been found to be true not only in the Indigenous participants, but almost all participants across the board. However, youth had also discussed wanting healthier options in their diets. I have observed from the

youth interviews that they are least comfortable with food access when they receive something as charity. Therefore, more investment in programs like the affordable food market where they pay a small amount, or the Community Food Centre where they are directly involved in the process of cooking, may allow recipients to feel better about the food they receive, which in turn may encourage greater participation. Korzun & Webb (2014) and Martin & Massicotte (2021) have both discussed how the food habits of youth are shaped by habits, behavior, and skill level of their teachers or caregivers at home. Drawing more people to these food support services, especially parents with young children, would help encourage healthy and nutritious food behaviours at home, leading to lasting impacts on the dietary habits for these children.

Secondary support organizations, who provide skills in cooking and food literacy, have a scope to step in here with complementary support. They should keep in mind that many of their participants may be patrons at food banks and soup kitchens, and have access to a range of standard, pantry foods. While it is commendable that organizations purchase and prepare fresh, nutritional, whole foods to encourage youth to learn healthier recipes, my recommendation is that these programs also consider what the youth regularly have access to at home. These skills development programs should be designed to teach youth strategies to make use of the food they obtain from primary support organizations. In addition to this, programs also need to incorporate skills in the 'before' and 'after' of making a meal, such as how to shop nutritious food on a budget, how to buy in bulk to save money, how to store large amounts of perishable food in smaller portions, and all-around meal planning skills. These are skills youth have expressed an interest in learning, and those who did have these skills, appreciated being able to implement them in their lives. Secondary support organizations could also implement skill development programs for sustained benefits in other areas of life, such as employment skills, financial literacy, and food literacy.

I also recommend examining the less visible challenges that youth face with regards to food access, and providing necessary support through empowerment. Programs should be developed that support youth in their emotional and psychological needs alongside their primary and secondary needs, and help them reach a point where they are able to advocate for and support themselves. It is also important to note here that tertiary barriers may actually discourage youth from accessing these very services that can help them. Bowen and Irish (2017) discussed the lack of trust and comfort youth have with government organizations, Goodman et al. (2019) discussed personal challenges in the youths' lives which prevent them from being vulnerable and asking for help, and Barker et al. (2015) discussed a lack of comfort youth may feel when sharing space with other people. Some of the youth in this research have directly addressed these issues, for example youth in transition choosing to sleep on the streets rather than at a shelter, and youth who have childhood trauma not being able to ask for help. A study into these particular needs, and associated support, is beyond the scope of this research, which would require longer, more vulnerable interviews, and developing strategies would require expertise from the fields of psychology, social work, and education.

When it comes to organizations providing support, it is apparent that they also require

support, especially around funding. I have concluded from staff participant interviews that organizations may benefit from a dedicated staff member focusing on securing grants and funding, and in addition to that, I suggest that they may also benefit from allocating sufficient time and resources for staff to thoroughly plan their programs. Details such as getting to know the needs and preferences of their participants may allow them to focus the programs as more sessions take place, and having the flexibility to make these changes will allow the participants to get more out of these sessions. Similarly with food banks and soup kitchens, while they largely rely on donations and have little say in what is provided, understanding the needs of their patrons may allow them to push for certain changes that support more people in different ways. Therefore, I recommend a greater attention to structured evaluation in these programs, including direct participant feedback.

It was discussed previously that the cultural component of food security is often overlooked in today's definitions (Bhawra et al., 2017). This is not completely true in the case of Thunder Bay. I have noticed that although primary support organizations do not have the capacity to process and serve wild meats, or have access to a variety of cultural foods, there is often an effort to include these items. An example is the bison and whole fish served at the local food bank, as well as Halal meats. In addition, I have also learned from a community meeting that the RFDA had plans to create a wild meat processing station, which would serve food bank and soup kitchen patrons. One of the non-profit organizations regularly works with Indigenous leaders to provide programming around traditional foods. While other organizations do not have the capacity for elaborate programs, they prefer to host smaller events in collaboration with Elders and knowledge keepers.

It is important to note that while cultural food security is an important concept, culture should not be imposed on youth who do not have an interest in cultural immersion. Youth growing up in cities often adapt to an urban lifestyle, and it is reflected in their habits, behaviour, and diets. Elliott et al. (2012) have discussed that food security for urban Indigenous youth may include a combination of traditional and market foods. Meanwhile, I have understood from conversations with youth that even though they desire traditional foods in their diets, they still consider basic, western diets to be their go-to meals. This is in line with what the Indigenous Elder participant had said around making compromises and encouraging familiarity when introducing youth to traditional foods. This highlights the need for cultural education for youth starting at an early age, so that they are interested in the food of their own accord, not because they feel obliged as a consequence of their ethnicity.

Loss of cultural connection has been extensively discussed in this thesis, pertaining to urban Indigenous youth. Alani-Verjee et al. (2017) have identified a disconnect between Indigenous youth and Elders, leading to a loss of cultural knowledge. McEachern (2021) has discussed how life in the city distances youth from their land and people, and how it impacts youths' relationships with their families and society. Although it was indeed observed that youth were not practicing their traditional teachings in their daily lives, this research found that Indigenous youth do have an interest in forming these relationships

if they have the opportunity. A number of youth have expressed an interest in connecting with Indigenous Elders, leaders, or mentors, who could teach them traditional values, practices, and stories, and help them feel connected to either what they had left behind, or for some, the things they had never known. It was encouraging to hear about traditional programming taking place through schools and various organizations; however, it was also found that long-term immersive programs were few and far between. Just like with any other program, consistency with a trusted mentor, especially with someone youth can connect with at a deeper level, may promote strength and healing in all four aspects of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

One of the ways in which this has been achieved in other parts of Canada is through Land Camps, which are land-based learning programs designed to be specific to various communities and cultures (Ljubicic, Mearns, Okpakok & Robertson, 2021). These programs are aimed at fostering connection, transferring skills from Elders to youth, and enhancing youths' cultural knowledge (Ljubicic et al., 2021). An example of this is the Living From the Land Project held in Nunavut's Kitikmeot region, which was a 10-day camp designed to connect youth with Elders (Longhurst, 2014). These are immersive programs with components of experiential learning, much like the moose hunt staff Participant 7A had discussed. Despite both Ljubicic et al. (2021) and Longhurst (2014) discussing the challenges of such programming, they both agreed that these programs were beneficial. Community-based organizations should invest into strategies to recreate such initiatives in the context of Northwestern Ontario. Such programs would have profound and lasting impacts on youth, especially for those who have an interest in cultural teachings and do not have access to the resources to participate.

One of the ways that organizations may collectively benefit in terms of supporting the community is greater collaboration and cooperation among each other. This is suggested with the understanding that various organizations within the community have the expertise to help youth with specific areas of need, and together they can help most youth with a great number of their barriers. From my conversations with staff from the two non-profit organizations, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, I also conclude that collaboration could be an important step in supporting youth with specific cultural needs. The non-Indigenous organizations who are actively supporting the community likely have funds, staff, and the space to hold traditional programs and events, to be performed by Indigenous facilitators. Indigenous organizations have cultural knowledge, and access to Elders and knowledge keepers, who could deliver culturally appropriate programming. Collaborations could lead to targeted, long-term, and immersive programming, where Indigenous organizations can be supported to lead these programs with youth.

This thesis has also highlighted some areas of successes that organizations have seen with their food support strategies. Many of the organizations in Thunder Bay have been found to design their programming around the needs of their participants, through formal and informal needs assessment. Many organizations had also modified their

programming during the COVID-19 pandemic to better support the community. An Emergency Food response team was formed through collaboration between several primary and secondary support organizations, who all focused on food as an area of need during this time. A Dignified Food Access campaign has been implemented in the community, geared towards reducing stigma and shame around food access. A new Community Food Centre is being established which is aimed to not only promote dignity and respect, but also encourage greater connection among community members, and provide advocacy support around their needs. It was found that the Thunder Bay community is well connected, where there is an emphasis on partnership between organizations, and support from the community members. While it can be said that some organizations have stronger networks and greater skillsets that allow them to acquire greater support, the work they do in the community is reflective of this, and collaboration and partnerships allow these efforts to be relayed to most youth who require support. These examples of work taking place in Thunder Bay could be used as reference points for community efforts in other, similar cities.

I will make a final recommendation with regards to the documentation of the work that is already taking place within the community. Within Thunder Bay, there is a strong network of community support organizations working with each other, and informational exchange through roundtables and community groups have led to successful program creation and delivery. However, communities with similar situations outside of Thunder Bay may not have access to this niche knowledge, unless they seek out and study all these initiatives individually. I recommend community-level, location-based research to be carried out in other communities as well, such as the ones in Clendenning et al. (2016). This information should also be shared widely, so as to encourage learning from each other, and building stronger support systems for communities all over Canada.

7.2 Conclusion

There are several implications for this research when it comes to different organizations and governing bodies. For organizations that were interviewed, findings around gaps in program delivery could encourage staff to place greater effort in communication and facilitation, and findings around tertiary barriers could draw their attention to identifying and addressing those needs. The successful strategies around support that are highlighted in this thesis may be beneficial to other organizations in the community, or in communities similar to Thunder Bay, who could incorporate or adapt these strategies into their programming. The focus on needs-assessment, and support geared towards the lifestyles of youth, has been deemed important in my findings, and this may encourage organizations to connect more with their youth and offer targeted supports. The findings in my thesis have also highlighted that support organizations are limited by the resources available to them, and this, brought to the attention of government bodies and funding organizations, could encourage greater funding streamlined into areas of greatest need. External factors, such as availability of housing or healthcare practitioners, are barriers at the systemic level that support organizations struggle with, and this research brings to the attention of policymakers the areas where changes may lead to greater support and resource access for youth in the community.

When it comes to the academic circle, this thesis fills a gap in investigating community-based efforts to address youth food insecurity. This kind of research is important not only to understand how issues of food insecurity manifest, and is addressed, in a diverse community such as Thunder Bay, but this thesis will also allow researchers to draw on these findings to recommend support strategies in similar communities. Several areas of future research have emerged from this thesis as well. This includes research into creation of immersive cultural programming in the context of Northwestern Ontario and development of models that can be adapted by local Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, creating a detailed review of funding and grants that could aid organizations in creating new and targeted programs, expanding on this research to include the voices of youth who face barriers that isolate them from supports, and replicating this research in similar communities to examine unique approaches to community support leading to higher-level recommendation around successes and challenges.

This research has not only gathered insights directly from the experiences of the youth, but as a location-based research, also explored the supports offered by organizations operating within this community. Several caring, thoughtful, and culturally sensitive programming are currently offered by organizations in Thunder Bay, with plans to expand their scope. It is clear from conversations with staff members that they are aware of the disadvantages experienced by their Indigenous program participants, and they are also aware of their needs. Organizations attempt to provide appropriate support within their capacity, and often go above and beyond with their advocacy. This paints a picture that contrasts with the racist and uncaring city Thunder Bay is often portrayed as. While systematic racism is a huge problem in Thunder Bay and Indigenous youth still have reasons to feel unsafe and insecure in this city, there is hope that at the community level there are efforts to combat these issues, and support youth in dignified, caring, and nurturing ways.

With regards to youth empowerment, several secondary support programs have also been found to operate within the community focusing on food and employment skills development, life skills and capacity building, mental health programs, recreational activities, and one-on-one support. The effort made by organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the community with food needs was also admirable. It can be said that organizations in Thunder Bay are proactive and sincere in their approaches to help support community needs.

However, food insecurity and income are inextricably linked and that programs like the ones in Thunder Bay, while important, are insufficient on their own if factors such as income, housing, healthcare, and personal safety are not met. In conclusion, it can be said that food security for youth is never just about food itself. It is part of an interconnected web of needs with many layers, which looks different for each individual. The problem of food security among youth cannot be solved until all these other barriers are also taken care of – and it is a huge task requiring efforts at various levels of government, community support, as well as the level of household, family, and the

individual. However, because these needs can be compared to a web as opposed to a linear progression, getting youth to a sustainable level of self-sufficiency would be difficult, but not impossible. Organizations are providing support around many of the needs and with proper support, targeted programming, and sustained efforts, it may be possible to move closer to food security and food sovereignty. Further research around the invisible and unspoken needs of youth could be an area of focus to move further towards this end.

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Appendix A: Direct food access services in Thunder Bay as of July 2021 (TBDHU, 2021)

WHERE TO GET FOOD IN THUNDER BAY

Food Banks – Northward

Gathering Table Food Cupboard
228 Pearl Street, 345-6898
• Second and fourth Sunday of the month, 11:30am - 12:15pm

Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
401 Cumberland Street North, 345-5840
• Third Tuesday
• By appointment only

Elevate NWO
102-106 - Cumberland St N, 345-1516
• For active clients, phone for details
• Available every Wednesday

Current River Churches Food Cupboard
361 Hodder Ave, Unit C, 344-3391
• Every second Saturday 8:30 - 11:30am
• Register via 211

Salvation Army Food Bank
545 North Cumberland Street, 345-7319
• Every Thursday, 11:00am – 2:00pm
• Register via 211

Bread Box, Bethlehem Church
75 Walkover St. (starting July 7th)
• Every second Wed 10:00am - 12:00pm
Register via 211

Affordable Fresh Produce

Good Food Box via Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre
73 N. Cumberland St. #101, 345 - 7819
• A monthly program for people who want to buy quality, fresh produce at a lower price than the grocery store, delivered to their neighborhood.

• Goodfoodboxtb.org for 2021 order & pick-up dates

Community Food Market via Roots to Harvest & NorWest CHC
Held @ Limbrick Resource Center, 97 Limbrick Place, 285 0189
• Every Tuesday from 1:00 - 4:00pm
• Fruits & vegetables at wholesale cost
• NorWest CHC has offered some clients "greens prescriptions" for food purchases at the market; call 626 8484 for info.

For more information
Call 211

Pamphlet updated July 2021 by Thunder Bay & Area Food Strategy

Additional Food Banks

Students

Lakehead University Food Bank
955 Oliver Road, UC-2014B, 343-8850
foodbank@lusu.ca
• Email to schedule a pick-up on Wednesday or Friday, 2:00 – 3:00pm
• Lakehead University students only; allowed one package per week

Confederation College Food Bank, SUCCI Office
Shuniah Rm 160, 475-6226
• Call or register online for pick up Monday to Friday, 8:30am - 4:30pm
• Confederation College students only

Rural

Rural Cupboard Food Bank
19 Holland Rd, Conmee Community Complex, 285-0836
• For rural residents outside of Thunder Bay west to Upsala and South to Pigeon River only
• Must show I.D. of each family member and verification of country address
• Open every third Wednesday 9:00 – 11:00am

Continued…

Free Daily Meals

Southward

Shelter House Soup Kitchen
420 George Street, 623-8182
• Breakfast, lunch and dinner served daily to clients
• Daily take-out lunch 1:30 - 2:30pm and dinner 7:00 - 8:00pm available to the public
• 24-hour access to sandwiches and pastries outside of meal service hours

Salvation Army Soup Van
• Dinner meal provided daily @ Minnesota Park 6:00 – 6:30pm

Grace Place
235 Simpson Street, 473-3538
• Hot dine-in meals Mon, Tues & Wed 1:00-4:00pm

Hope for Change Community Group
• Provides weekend snacks, soup, etc.
• Saturday's 3:00 – 5:00pm @ Blake Funeral Home

Northward

St. Andrew's Dew Drop Inn
292 Red River Road, 345-0481
• Open to the public daily
• Take home lunch 9:00am – 3:30pm
• Hot meal 12:30 – 3:30pm

Free Daily Meals

Northward (cont'd)

Salvation Army Soup Van
• Dinner meal provided daily @ Wilson Park 7:00 – 7:30pm

Urban Abbey/The Habit
308 Red River Rd, *768-8923*
• Open to the public
• Lunch Monday to Friday 12:30pm
• Dinner Saturday 5:30pm

Hope for Change Community Group
• Provides weekend snacks, soup, etc.
• Sunday's 3:00 – 5:00pm @ Parking Lot across On Deck

Food Banks - Southward

Thunder Bay Food Bank
129 Miles Street East, 626-9231
• Every second Friday 9:00 - 11:00am
• Register via 211

Family Giving Centre @ St. Thomas Anglican Church
1400 South Edward Street, 623-3608
• Every second Friday 10:00 - 11:30am
• Register via 211

Food Banks – Southward (cont'd)

Redwood Park Church Food Bank
532 North Edward St West, 577-3463
• Every second Thursday 12:00 -2:30pm
• Register via 211

The Losier Centre (Food Cupboard) @ Thunder Bay Methodist Church
920 Sprague Street 622-7686
• Emergency food available from the storage container (just off Christina)

The Gathering Place
239 Amelia Street West, 623-8184
• Every second Tuesday 10:00am - 1:00pm
• Register via 211

Our Kids Count
704 McKenzie Street, 623-0292
• ID required
• Thursday's 1:00-4:00

St. Agnes - St. Vincent de Paul Society
1019 Brown Street, 475-7489
• Every second Friday 9:00 – 10:30am
• Register via 211

Appendix B: Overview of Food Support Organizations

Supports existing prior to the pandemic

Beendigen: Provides food and shelter for Indigenous women and children seeking refuge from abuse at home. Services include support, referrals, counselling, and safety planning, and during the pandemic offered food purchase gift cards to community members in need.
https://www.beendigen.com/

Boys and Girls Club: Provides after-school programs and support to children and youth aged 4-18 years at two different neighbourhood locations. These include homework help, cooking classes, arts and crafts, cultural programming among others. The organization also provides daily healthy snacks to program participants, hosts a Supper Club once or twice a week at their locations for participants, and provides hot breakfast to several schools as part of the Breakfast Club.
https://tbayboysandgirlsclub.org/

Dew Drop Inn: A daily hot meal program open to all community members during lunch hours with an option to take home a cold lunch any time during business hours. There is no registration requirements, and it is open 365 days a year. During the pandemic, this was the largest direct food support service in Thunder Bay. According to the website and social media posts, the Dew Drop Inn served 90,434 meals and lunches in 2019 which was a record in their 40 years of service. In 2020, this number rose to 110,565 meals and in 2021 it was 121,072. The centre also provides a grocery-style take-home section where patrons are able to obtain donated and rescued food. Recently in collaboration with a local non-profit Roots to Harvest, the Dew started a food hamper pick up for seniors at their location, after identifying this demographic as particularly vulnerable during the pandemic.
https://dewdropinnThunderbay.ca/

Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre: Part of the "Original Six" Friendship Centres in Ontario, and was founded in 1964. Provides support to Indigenous people in the areas of children and family services; employment, training and education; healing and wellness; and justice services. The TBIFC hosts a monthly food bank, and since the pandemic offers food hampers for Elders once a month in collaboration with Roots to Harvest.
https://tbifc.ca/

Get Out of the Cold Initiative: City-funded winter warming shelter within the city. Donations make food and warm drinks are available to users.

Good Food Box: A non-profit organization in Thunder Bay administered by the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre. The GFB is a community-based food security organization which provides fresh fruit and vegetables to low- or fixed-income

households at low costs once a month. Boxes are made available for pick up in various locations within the city.
https://goodfoodboxtb.org/

NorWest Community Health Centres: Primary health care provider in Thunder Bay, and offers support in the areas of exercise, diabetes, mental health, LGBTQ needs, FASD, and food and nutrition. Food related support is offered through dietitian support, cooking demos, monthly seniors' lunches, and biweekly community kitchens for people affected with FASD. The health centre in Thunder Bay is also a Good Food Box pick up site.
https://www.norwestchc.org/locations/Thunder-bay

Our Kids Count: A community focused organization supporting children, youth and families through personal growth and development, open to community members. Food related programming includes community kitchens for children, adults and young parents, breakfast programs, and pre/post-natal nutrition support. Discussions around additional support and resources are facilitated during these cooking programs. During covid, much of the programming moved to take home ingredients and virtual cooking models. A weekly emergency food cupboard is available for members at two neighbourhood locations.
https://www.ourkidscount.ca/

Red Cross: The Red Cross funds the Student Nutrition Program in 70% of the schools in Thunder Bay according to the Nutrition Guidelines set out by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Breakfast foods and snacks are made available to students before the start of the school day 3-5 days a week. During the pandemic, the Red Cross partnered with Roots to Harvest and distributed nutritious food hampers for students undergoing virtual learning at various pick-up locations around the city.
https://www.redcross.ca/in-your-community/ontario/community-support-services/student-nutrition-program

Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA): Central food distributor to member organizations including food banks, soup kitchens and other community support organizations. Coordinates the Christmas Cheer food hampers once a year and organizes city wide food drives to redistribute to areas of need. During the pandemic, food hamper delivery to seniors and people with mobility and health issues via 211.
https://www.foodbanksnorthwest.ca/

Roots to Harvest: A community focused non-profit supporting youth, adults and newcomers providing employment, skill development, and wrap-around support. Youth in high school, or in the NEET group (Not in Employment, Education or Training) are employed to work in farming programs allowing them to make an income and develop employment skills while learning about healthy food and nutrition. Roots uses two urban garden sites within the city to grow large amounts of food which are directed towards fresh produce markets, used in fundraiser events, or are used in cooking programs in their industrial scale kitchen. Cooking programs take place in collaboration with the Lakehead Adult Education Centre to provide school credits to learners, and at various

alternative education centres around the city to create engagement and conversation through shared meals. Roots also works in various elementary and high schools around the city and in remote northern communities delivering programs to youth around growing and preparing fruits and vegetables in their schoolyard gardens and kitchens. During the pandemic, the structure of Roots shifted to a focus on emergency food response, and in collaboration with partner organizations Roots received and packaged nutritious food items and distributed 400-600 bags every week to families with children undergoing online learning. In addition, the industrial kitchen was used to prepare meals for the Dew Drop Inn and Shelter House's daily meal programs. Roots also organized the distribution of Seniors Food Bags through the Dew Drop Inn, packaged bags for the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Indigenous Friendship Centre, created culturally appropriate food bags for newcomer and Arabic families, and provided food access support to old and current participants as needed. Roots has also launched two affordable food markets taking place weekly, one in a low-income Thunder Bay neighbourhood and the other in Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek (Gull Bay First Nation). Roots to harvest is in the process of becoming the only Community Food Centre in Northwestern Ontario allowing a greater community access to their services.
http://www.rootstoharvest.org/

Shelter House: Provides short-term support with shelter, food, clothing referrals, addiction support, street outreach, and access to resources for people in immediate need. Open 365 days a week, the Shelter House offers community lunch and dinner services every day and hosts a 24-hour access window for cold food and other essentials. 3 meals a day are available to overnight residents which has a capacity of up to 62 men, women, and youth. The S.O.S. outreach program drives around the city 2pm to 2am every day providing support, resources and transportation to homeless, intoxicated and high-risk people in our community.
https://www.shelterhouse.on.ca/

Shkoday Abinojiiwack Obimiwedoon: An Indigenous organization focused on children and youth. Shkoday has two programs. The Aboriginal Headstart is aimed at 2–6-year-old preschool children who attend full day classroom programming in creative art, fine/gross motor activities, science, dramatic play, music, language and culturally appropriate experiences. Biwaase'aa is a skill development program aimed at school-age children. Programming is offered to youth aged 7-18 years in 8 different schools in Thunder Bay and includes strategies in academic improvement, emotional development, cultural awareness, and nutritional support. The program provides lunch and snacks to participants and funding dependant, can provide food or gift cards to participants' families.
https://www.shkoday.com/

Student Union Confederation College (SUCCI): Hosts a Student Emergency Food Bank which provides curbside pick-up of a bag of non-perishable food items. This is accessible once per semester, requires a current student identification card and prior registration. This service is not accessible to general community members.
https://www.cognitoforms.com/SUCCI3/StudentEmergencyFoodBank

Thunder Bay District Health Unit: The TBDHU has hosted a Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program in Northwestern Ontario since 2018, which provides fresh food to students in JK through Grade 8 twice every week. During the pandemic this program expanded to support students undergoing virtual learning, students in remote communities, and food programs in local community organizations. This program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and is distributed by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.
https://www.tbdhu.com/NFVP

Youth Inclusion Program: Offers support to youth aged 12 to 24 years with individual or group-based activities. Youth can be referred into the program or self-refer. Three neighbourhood locations exist in Thunder Bay where registered youth are able to drop-in and speak with a youth navigator based on needs in their life, or participate in group programming around life skills, art, recreation activities, to community outings among others. On-site snacks are provided during activities and youth navigators are able to provide emergency food access as required. This program is funded and run by the city of Thunder Bay.
https://www.Thunderbay.ca/en/recreation/youth-inclusion.aspx

Youth Move: Recreation focused after school programming is offered to youth between the ages of 10 and 18. Three drop-in sites are running in Thunder Bay providing various in person and virtual activities for registered participants. Students are offered dinner during weekdays as well as snacks during programming. This is also a city funded program.
https://www.Thunderbay.ca/en/recreation/youth-programs.aspx

Organizations that initiated food support during the pandemic

211: A centrally coordinated service connecting people in Ontario with emergency food services near them. During the pandemic, many of the food service organizations in Thunder Bay collaborated with 211 to streamline registration and food pick up. One of the drawbacks of this service is having access to a phone. This is where secondary wrap-around support was able to step in and provide that connection.
https://211ontario.ca/211-topics/food/

Anishnawbe Mushkiki: Primary health care provider for people with Indigenous identities. Aims to provide culturally appropriate care in the areas of health, immunizations, mental wellness, traditional wellness, sexual health, diabetes and nutrition, and community programs. During the pandemic, weekly resource boxes were made available to clients in need.
https://mushkiki.com/

Elevate NWO: A community-based non-profit which provides services to members living with, affected by or at risk of HIV, AIDS, and Hepatitis C in Thunder Bay and

Northwestern Ontario. Weekly food hampers were delivered to members during the pandemic, and the organization also hosts a weekly food bank which can be accessed through 211.
https://elevatenwo.org/

Elizabeth Fry Society: A charitable organization which supports and advocates for women in prison, women transitioning back into the community, and women at risk of criminalization. Programs include court support, jail visitation, public education and advocacy, release planning and skill based and mental health focused weekly programing. In collaboration with Roots to Harvest, the organization has made available once a month ready to eat food bags for clients.
https://www.elizabethfrynwo.org/

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS): Provides support and services to off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples living with or affected by HIV/AIDS following harm reduction principles. Food support is provided through available snacks anytime at the office, provision of food, warm winter gear, tents, grocery bags, and gift cards to newly diagnosed community members, and supply of food to existing members as needed.
https://www.oahas.org/

People Advocating for Change through Empowerment (PACE): An Organization supporting people with mental health and addiction. Programs include snacks and socializing, games, art therapy, and addictions education groups. During the pandemic, bi-weekly food hampers were available to clients.
https://pace-tbay.net/home-1

Thunder Bay District Social Services Board (TBDSSAB): Provides social services to those in need including supports with childcare, housing, employment, and Ontario Works (government financial aid). The organization also acts as a Good Food Box pick up site and offers deliveries since the pandemic. DSSAB had also been financing 66 cell phones during 2021 to allow people to connect with food security resources, such as registrations. DSSAB currently has a Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) Food Security Fund, which will go to organizations undertaking food security initiatives that help address and prevent homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay.
https://www.tbdssab.ca/

Appendix C: Youth Participant Demographics

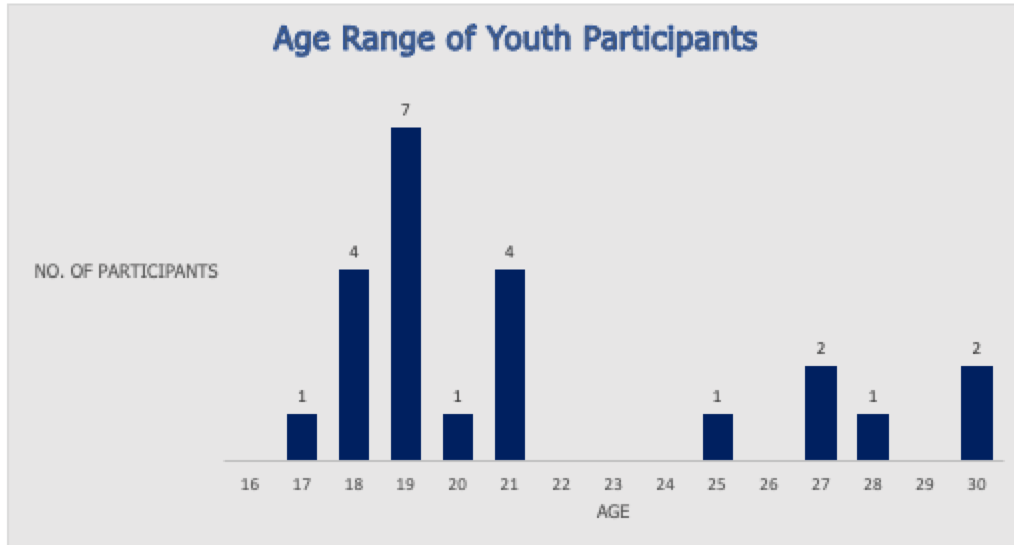

Figure a: Age range of Youth Participants

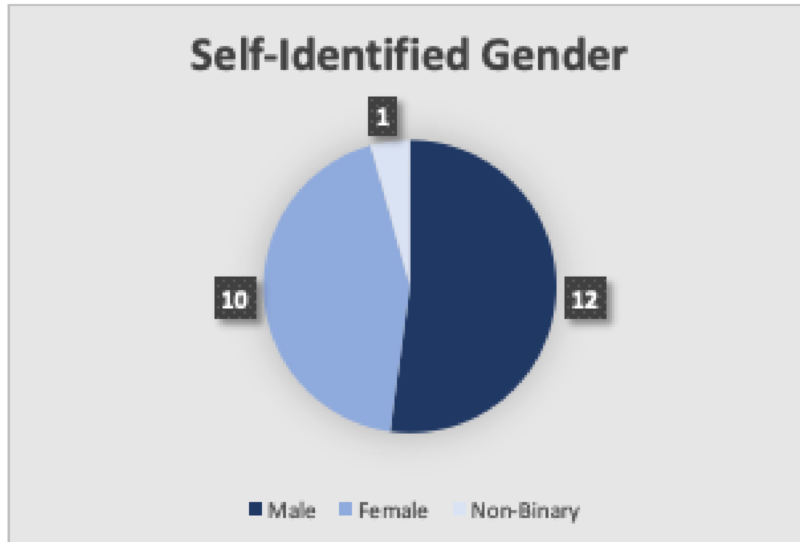

Figure b: Gender of Youth Participants

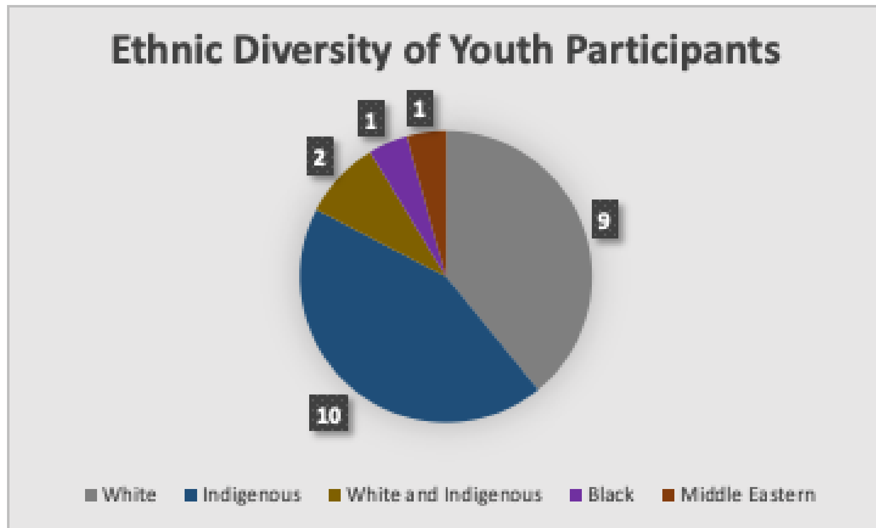

Figure c: Ethnicity of Youth Participants

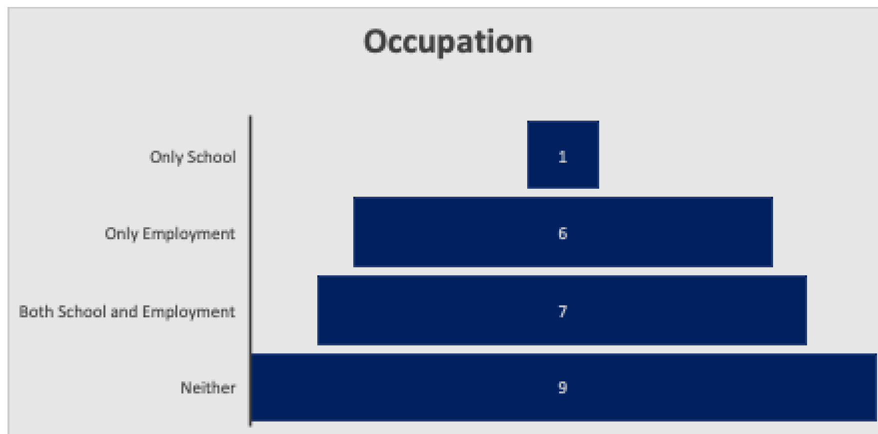

Figure d: Number of youth enrolled in school, and number in active employment

Appendix D: Youth Participant Interview Questionnaire

Interview Guide: Youth
Interview Questionnaire for youth participants
Materials:

- Information Consent form, Covid Screening form
- Incentive (lunch+ $10 gift card)
- Resource/Information sheet
- Bus tickets if meeting in person

Note:
This is a semi-structured interview, and the following questions are used as a guide. Not all the questions will be asked, rather the participant will be encouraged to have a natural conversation with some of the following questions used to guide the conversation towards topics of interest.

Introduction:
Thanks for being here. I appreciate your willingness to chat with me. Just a reminder that I am here to listen to your thoughts and opinions, and you can decide to end the conversation whenever you want. You also don't have to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable with, and if you say something that you don't want recorded, I will remove it from my records. Also, your identity will be kept confidential, and I will be able to send you a copy of all the data I am planning to use after we finish this conversation in a secure file, if you want it and have the technology to access it.

The research I am conducting is focused on the food scene in Thunder Bay. More specifically, how are young people doing in terms of accessing the food that they need. Some of the questions I ask will be a bit direct, and I really want to remind you that I am not here to judge your financial situations or eating habits. This is mostly to get a good idea of what young people are experiencing, and then suggest recommendations to food organizations on how they can help everyone better. Your honest answers will really help me get a good idea of the ways youth can be better supported in Thunder Bay.

Demographic Information

- How old are you? How do you identify (gender and ethnicity)?
- Who do you live with? Tell me about your household.
- How many people have an income in your household? Do you mind sharing what that looks like?
- Are there any dependents, such as small children or Elderly relatives?
- Who contributes to shopping for food (groceries and fast food)?
- How many times a month does your household do grocery shopping/food shopping?
- Where else do you go for food, other than the grocery stores?
- Are you currently in school?
- Are you currently employed and making an income?

People in your circle:

- What kind of food do you like eating?
- When it comes to your family, how comfortable are you with discussing food and budget? Do you ever make plans for groceries at home? How involved are the adults in your household?

Assure that this is not to make a judgement or to report the information, but to consider creating new programs that support the families as well as the youth.

- When it comes to your friends and family, to what extent are you all concerned about food and health? How seriously do you take it? Would you eat whatever, or consciously make an effort to eat a certain kind of food?
- If you, your friends, and family are eating more fast food, what are the reasons for this choice?
- If there are barriers to making food at home, what are they?
- For yourself or your family, how would cost compare when buying and making food at home versus getting takeout?
- Which would be preferable?
- Would you ever seek out more affordable food items to make at home?

Food Preferences:

- Briefly, what are the foods that you regularly eat? What do your average meals look like?
- Would you like anything to change with the way you are eating?
- Do you have preferences of food that you don’t always eat for some reason?
- Are there types of food you would want to explore but don’t know how to? Or food that you like, but don’t know how to make or where to find ingredients?
- What gets in the way of making these changes?
- In order to eat the kind of food you would like to be eating daily, what things or support would you need?

- Is there any food from your culture that you seek out?
- What are your thoughts on ‘culturally appropriate’ foods?
- Definition: food that is appropriate for a person based on their culture, upbringing, food habits and traditions, the people they share it with, the particular way food is grown etc.
- Do you have any food in your culture/background/childhood/tradition that you like?
- How important is it for you to have this kind of food in your diet?
- Are there any food related skills in your family or culture that you would like to have?
- On a scale of 1-10, how much do you care for food that ties to your culture and background? Is It an important part of your life, is It something that you are indifferent about, or is it something that you don’t think about and don’t relate with?

Food Skills:

- Do you prefer having a place to go and receive food (such as a food program or takeout), or do you prefer more involvement in your own food, such as cooking, learning about food types, budgeting your food money, etc.?'
- How much time can you afford to take for each meal?
- What are some barriers you face in trying to be more involve in your own food?
- What are some food skills you have, or would like to have to help you better meet your needs around, good, tasty, and nourishing food?
- Could your food situation be different if you had some other skills and knowledge? What do you think could help?

Access to Food

- How do you feel about the food situation in your life right now? Are you having more than enough, just enough, or not enough?
- Is there a financial barrier to food for you?
- Are you receiving support from anywhere like money or food?
- If you are receiving support from local food programs, which ones and why do you prefer them? If not, what is preventing you from accessing the services locally provided? (If applicable)
- Can you think of a list of all the sources you obtained food from in the past year? examples: grocery stores, fast food, food banks, from school breakfast/lunch programs, from youth programs in the city, from friends and relatives, from 211 or food hampers, from growing your own food, etc.
- Which of those felt like a place where you felt safe and comfortable getting food from? What exactly made you like those places?
- Do you think these will be a stable and reliable source of food for you in the future?
- In what ways will these be stable and reliable for you?
- What about the places where you did not feel good about accessing the food? What made those places not feel comfortable for you?
- What are one or two things about those places that were off-putting and not welcoming?......

Have you heard of (list of programs, obtained from talking to program leads/staff at organizations)?
This will be adjusted based on the background of this person. Do they access multiple organizations?

- Have you accessed them?
- If not, why? Now that you heard about them would you access them? (Include information sheets for the participants to access these services later)
- If yes, what did you think?
- Did you learn something that you use in your daily life?
- Would you consider this a stable and reliable source of food access?

- Did you receive what you were hoping to learn from these programs?
- Did they miss anything you think could have been helpful?

Weather and seasonal changes, and external factors

- Do you find your access to food changes with the weather (winter vs. summer?)
- Is there a time of year when you find your food situation worse than other times?
- How do these factors affect your food availability?
    - Transport
    - Housing
    - Phone/internet access (communication)
    - School/work
- Have you received any support around these things in your life from local organizations or your school?
- What are some other barriers that you can think of that provides an obstacle for your food access?

Thank you again for your time. Here are some details of the local food programs I mentioned, give them a try if you feel like it. I will keep your name and contact information separate from your answers, and only I will know the connection. If you have any questions, or feel like you want to change anything you said, you can contact me at (519) 993-2469 or by email (mstarann@uwaterloo.ca) or our Facebook Page (TBay Youth Food Access 2021). Or you can contact my Supervisor Johanna Wandel at jwandel@uwaterloo.ca. I can send you a transcript of this interview so that you know what information I have, if you want and have the ability to access a password protected pdf file.

Appendix E: Staff Participant Interview Questionnaire

Organizational Information

- What is the mission and vision of this organization? (Where is the focus?)
- How would you describe this organization's role in dealing with youth and food?
- What are some other areas you focus on?
- How is this work funded? (Each project)
- Do you collaborate/partner with any external organizations? (Snowball list)
- What are some of your programs that address food issues among youth? (From all your experiences)
- How many staff work at this organization?
- How many staff work in the areas of youth and food?
- What changes were experienced during Covid?

Overview of the organizations

- What programs are delivered through this organization?
- What are the programs you are involved with?

Program Details

- Are there programs specific to youth? Are there programs specific to Indigenous youth?
- How are the programs designed? How do you decide which areas to focus on? (What do you indeed focus on?)
- More specifically, what areas are addressed in relation to food, and other issues? Do you provide meals, skills, training, etc.
- How are the programs delivered?
- How are the participants recruited? Is there a selection criterion?
- How are the participants informed of the program?
- How is success of the programs assessed? What benchmarks are used?
- What was the length of the program? Is there continuity and consistency, or are they one off with different groups each time?
- How many participants attended?
- How did you evaluate if the programs benefited the participants?
- What was the success criteria?
- What were the expected outcomes, and was there an aim to provide skills for short and long-term use?
- Was there an assessment done prior to program design to address areas of most need?
- Were there follow ups, and what was the response like?
- Where did the funding for the program come from, and were there any conditions that needed to be met in the implementation of the programs?
- Is there a summary report that I can access?
- Would you be willing to pass on the details of this research and my contact information to the youth you work with, and help me recruit some participants for the youth interviews?
- Are you aware of other organizations who do similar work?

Appendix F: Descriptions of the Organizations Interviewed

Organization 1: A not for profit organization focused on employment and life skills development for youth and adults
Organization 2: A government funded organization focused on family and childhood development.
Organization 3: A local not for profit organization providing daily meals to those in need.
Organization 4: A government funded initiative to support youth around life's needs.
Organization 5: A staff member from a local high school.
Organization 6: A government funded organization focused on socializing and engagement through recreation among youth.
Organization 7: An Indigenous Elder who has worked with various Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations in the city
Organization 8: An Indigenous organization focused on early childhood development and cultural support for school-aged youth
Organization 9: A local food bank which provides emergency food support to community members in need