

SILVER LININGS & SOBER REALITIES

Richmond Food Asset and Need Scan – 2021 Update



Silver Linings and Sober Realities – A Richmond Food Asset and Need Scan (2021)

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This project was undertaken in collaboration with Urban Bounty, Union Gospel Mission, the Richmond Food Aid Delivery Coalition, and the Richmond Food Bank Society. The goal of this project was to assess the current state of food access, needs, key stakeholders and gaps, and changes since the 2020 report *Food Brings Community*.

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We would like to acknowledge that we live, work, learn, and play on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the ṣxʷməθkʷəy̓əməʔł təməxʷ (Musqueam), S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), Kwantlen, Stz'uminus, and sc̓əwaθenaʔł təməxʷ (Tsawwassen) Peoples.

We humbly and gratefully make this acknowledgement to pay our profound respects to the hosts of this land, for their stewardship for time immemorial, and to remind ourselves of the history and present-day implications to our society as a whole.

For clarification or suggestions about this work, please contact churchrelations@ugm.ca or director@richmondfoodsecurity.org.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
FOOD INSECURITY IN RICHMOND.....	1
FOOD AVAILABLE	2
OTHER SUPPORTS	2
ADDRESSING NEEDS BEYOND FOOD	2
TRANSPORTATION	3
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH	3
HOUSING.....	3
EMPLOYMENT.....	3
CLOTHING.....	4
TECHNOLOGY.....	4
SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THROUGH THE PANDEMIC	4
UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS.....	5
PANDEMIC LESSONS	7
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	8
ADVOCACY.....	8
COLLABORATION	9
COMMUNICATION.....	9
LEARNING	9
OUTREACH.....	10
ONGOING DATA COLLECTION.....	10
CONCLUSION.....	10
APPENDIX A.....	11

INTRODUCTION

“Not Much. A church stops by once a week, or so,”

This was the response from someone living in a vehicle in central Richmond, when an outreach worker asked where he finds food. We all know what it feels like to be hungry, though we may not have experienced the challenges of chronic under-nutrition. And we know, or can imagine, the desperation that comes from feeling unseen and unable to live securely.

With the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, we continue to see significant shifts in the needs of vulnerable individuals and supports available to them, and thus, there was a need to update the [2020 Richmond Food Access Report](#). This report highlights the rich and compassionate network of food shared with individuals on the margins in Richmond, and shows that there is much more to do. Evidence tells us that food programs do not end hunger - only an adequate income will do that¹. Still, every shared meal, every bag of groceries, and every connection matters as we work alongside both our vulnerable neighbours, and those with the power to influence the policies, budgets, and systems that reduce and eventually eliminate food insecurity and other poverty related challenges.

It will be some time before we understand the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but already we know that on top of those already struggling, nearly half of Canadians residents felt the impact of COVID-19 on their ability to meet financial obligations and essential needs.² We were all negatively affected by the uncertainty and evolving restrictions, and we also saw some unprecedented collaboration and generosity. As one program coordinator said, it has been a season of *sober realities and silver linings*.

FOOD INSECURITY IN RICHMOND

The 2020 BC Centre for Disease Control *COVID-19 SPEAK Survey* revealed that 20.1% of Richmond residents were concerned about food security. This is a significant increase from the 6.3% of Richmond residents who were found to be food insecure from the *My Health My Community*

¹ Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

² Men F, Tarasuk V. Food insecurity amid the COVID-19 pandemic: food charity, government assistance and employment. Canadian Public Policy 2021; Published online. Available from: <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/cpp.2021-001>.

Survey,³ conducted by Vancouver Coastal Health in 2013. Results from round two of the COVID-19 SPEAK survey are expected to be published before the end of 2021.⁴

FOOD AVAILABLE

Most food programs assessed in this review affirmed that the need for assistance had grown over the past year, and programs are at capacity. Still, there is a desire and commitment to not turn anyone away who is in need of food and support. The Richmond Food Bank and Food Aid Delivery Coalition have been tracking the available food in order for member organizations to be aware of other supports and assess how well others are doing. Members of the Food Aid Delivery Coalition distribute about 3500 meals on average each week.

The chart in **Appendix A** does not capture all food supports, but does give an indication of what is available in Richmond each week.

OTHER SUPPORTS

As well as these regular supports, there are some smaller partnerships where churches, community groups, and other caring neighbours provide meals for supportive organizations on special occasions like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, or made and delivered meals to the organizations to distribute. These cannot all be captured, but do add up to a significant measure of support in Richmond.

ADDRESSING NEEDS BEYOND FOOD

While this report focuses on food provision, we know that most food program guests visit multiple supports as individuals see access to enough food, secure housing, as well as labour, financial, and health services.

Food programs are a place of connection, where we can help our vulnerable neighbours connect to services like:

³ <https://myhealthmycommunity.org/community-profile/richmond/>

⁴ BCCDC, "Richmond Region Economic Impacts," *BC COVID-19 SPEAK Survey*, last updated December 3, 2020, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/bccdc/viz/BCCOVID-19SPEAKSurvey/BCCOVID-19SPEAKresults>.

Transportation

- Transportation can be a barrier to accessing community meals or impede one's ability to take home larger food hampers.
- In particular, there is no program for car repair services to support those living in vehicles. These individuals are eligible for housing subsidies, but these funds cannot be used towards car repairs - this falls outside of service providers' mandates. There needs to be more responsiveness for this group.



Mental and Physical Health

- People are wanting to talk but volunteers at meals are limited in their capacity as they are not trained in counselling, etc.
- The number of people living in poverty and experiencing poor mental health compounds. The “wearing down” of living in poverty that individuals experience has consequences for both mental and physical wellness. These people need support.
- Providing health services and information services are something that would like to be able to provide post-COVID.
- Inviting other services to community meals is important (public librarian, CHIMO, translators for Mandarin and Cantonese, pastoral care for guests and volunteers but cognizant of line between pastoral and referral).



Housing

- Other household items and cleaning supplies are needed, specifically during the pandemic (dish soap, hand sanitizer, etc.) to help reduce the financial burden.
- Some requests about shelters.



Employment

- Individuals who had lost their jobs as a result of COVID driven business closures (specifically in the hospitality sector).



Clothing

- Access to clothing is another fundamental human right. Thrift stores provide low-income individuals with access to clothing. Richmond Family Place thrift store also provides clothing free of charge to guests referred to the agency by partners.



Technology

- We had already been moving towards more technology, but the pandemic increased our capacity for and reliance on virtual tools (including work meetings, healthcare appointments, AA and other support groups, etc.).
- We must ensure that people have access to the tools needed to engage in existing supports and networks. Some service providers were asked about access to Internet when the library had been closed during the pandemic.



SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

We had to adapt many of our practices and programs with the changing recommendations through the pandemic, often figuring out best practices together as we've processed the dynamic information that was available. Changes highlighted by service providers included:

- Fewer people are coming to pick up meals than would attend an in-person community meal, likely for several reasons:
 - Many attend the community meal for the social aspect, rather than basic food needs.
 - People who rely on food programs usually have compromised health, and felt unsafe (or concerningly uncertain) about coming to a public space.
 - Income supports (i.e., CERB) helped those who were eligible for programs to meet basic needs.
- At the same time, some programs saw an increase in new participants, indicating a significant number of people who had not needed this kind of support, were newly vulnerable (usually related to loss of income experienced during the pandemic)

- Other support programs in place were halted because of the pandemic (i.e., seniors' gatherings, classes for newcomers, after school programs).
- Fewer children were seen at programs where they would have attended pre-COVID, but more people requested multiple meals or extra food to take home, so they could provide for children and/or elders.
- Partnerships and sharing resources increased significantly between agencies, which took significant time and coordination.

UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects vulnerable individuals as many of the existing supports disappeared or changed, and challenges emerged and compounded. We asked service providers who they see as the most underserved populations in Richmond:

Homeless Individuals: people living rough or in vehicles

- A few vegetarians, or those who follow a lactose (dairy) free-diet or pork-free diet.
- Many with poor teeth, so need softer food.
- A few women, who tend to be less open to outreach workers, until trust is built.
- It is risky to leave one's belongings to go to food and support programs.
- A few more young couples noted recently.
- Indigenous individuals – the 2020 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count found a 21% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness from the previous count in 2017. Of these individuals, 21% identified as Indigenous compared to less than 1% of Richmond's overall population.⁵

Individuals with Disabilities:

- Continues to be a gap for individuals with disabilities or who are home-bound.

Seniors:

- Impacted by loneliness and loss of their support networks during the pandemic.

⁵ City of Richmond, Homelessness Strategy – 2020 Update, (Richmond: City of Richmond, 2020): 6, https://www.richmond.ca/__shared/assets/richmond_homelessness_strategy_2019_2029_2020_update58905.pdf.

- Growing number do not have pension or investments that can meet financial needs, especially as costs increase and CPP/OAS/GIS does not increase at the same rate.

Individuals with Mental Health Challenges

- Especially when that is paired with inadequate income and social supports.

New immigrants and Refugees

- Who are struggling with adequate employment and getting established.
- Language barriers and discrimination make accessing supports challenging.

Vulnerable Women: women in abusive relationships, or without a secure home

- We do not see these women as much in support programs, so we do not design services tailored to meet their needs (for safety and practical needs).
- Some estimates that domestic violence against women increased, given the stress many were under and extended times at home, which would make it even harder for women to access needed supports.

Harm Reduction: very few formal harm reduction services exist in Richmond

- There is much stigma around addiction, which makes seeking support exceptionally challenging.
- Harm reduction is a non-judgemental, non-coercive, evidence-based approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with substance use.

Snapshot of a night with the UGM Mobile Mission Van ⁶		
Male Adults: 6 Female Adults: 0 New Contacts: 2	Refused Service: 2 Meaningful Conversations: 5 Care Items Given: 6	Internal Referrals: 1 External Referrals: 2 (someone was asking about accessing showers)

For each of these vulnerable populations, services ideally need to be tailored to their needs, ideally including:

⁶ <https://www.ugm.ca/services/meals-outreach/>

- Being geographically close to where individuals live
- Feeling safe
- Having peer-support

PANDEMIC LESSONS

We knew, and were shown again in the pandemic, that extra and longer-term support is better than haphazard crisis responses. When we have secure housing, food, income, and autonomy to make choices about our lives, we do not need to operate in crisis mode and rely on social services.

Service providers in Richmond also shared these lessons learned:

- **Collaboration** – There is value in a central organization of communication and resource sharing so all groups can learn about existing assets.
 - Valuable to know what exists in our neighbourhood, city, region, and beyond.
 - Change will happen with input from multiple sectors.
 - Bringing in city representatives, and/or other groups with power and resources can help to make this happen.
- **Partnerships** – Partnerships with communal agencies were invaluable, and strengthened during the pandemic.
 - When trusted relationships existed, adaptations could happen quickly (resource sharing, new programs, shared space arrangements).
- **Income & Financial Support**
 - No formalized funding models for “one-offs,” or individuals who need crisis relief, not ongoing support exist in Richmond. However, there are several churches, agencies, and individuals who quietly provide this kind of support.
 - Responses like the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) were valuable to many, but not available for some who are work outside of official workforces, or the informal sector (i.e., domestic labourers, caregivers, sex workers).
- **Agency** – One of the hardest things during the pandemic was the high and necessary focus on safety, which altered normal program operations and delivery.
 - Program participants and many long-time volunteers could no longer participate in program delivery, and thus lost the opportunity to serve their community, which is vital for our sense of self and agency.

- **Awareness** – As vulnerabilities were exposed, we also saw an unprecedented awareness raising of the challenges of poverty, both locally and internationally.
 - Although a compassionate understanding of vulnerabilities is only the first step, it is necessary in order to take the next step towards transformational supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In researching the policy landscape, it is evident that policies targeting food security, poverty reduction, and community wellness present bold action plans, but lack the associated funding, metrics, and evaluation processes to achieve these goals. Emergency funding during the pandemic provided much needed and necessary support to agencies working to address food insecurity. This allocation of funding demonstrates that governments are able to provide the appropriate resources, yet only when confronted head-on with the consequences of poverty. In order to address the root causes of food insecurity and poverty and create transformative systems change, longer-term, more sustainable funding commitments will be required.

There are many projects in the community looking into the themes around food security that have been explored in this report. Most recently, the Richmond Food Bank commissioned a [study](#) conducted by Dr. Chris Hergesheimer around the emergency food provision network in Richmond. Dr. Hergesheimer’s recommendations are focused on building network capacity and increasing collaboration, coordination, and data sharing amongst service providers.

This report focuses on the needs and gaps spotlighted from conversations with community meal providers. Addressing the underserved populations highlighted here, and acting on the pandemic lessons will take mutual aid or communities coming together to support each other. The recommendations below are grouped under themed headings, however many of these recommendations touch on multiple themes, not just the one.

ADVOCACY

- Along with personal support, community groups, municipalities, and other organizations are encouraged to commit to engage in **advocacy** and **awareness** (or partner with those who have the skills and capacity) around adequate income supports (especially for individuals with disabilities), housing options, childcare, and elder care.
- Continue to **collaborate to press the City for action and funding** on concrete poverty reduction efforts. The faith community and other agencies will always be willing to do this work, but need funding and resources in order to do so.

COLLABORATION

- Community members want to help – give them **direction** on what is really helpful and where they can make meaningful contribution to the community.
- Conduct **consultations** with those accessing community meals to better understand their needs and lived experiences. **Authentic engagement** with these stakeholders in the development of programs will ensure that programs are able to meet their needs in a way that is grounded in dignity and respect.
- **Mutual support** in fundraising, succession and strategic planning – especially for smaller community programs.

COMMUNICATION

- Those of us who have influence must get to know and share the experiences and desires of those who are vulnerable, **increasing** their **social capital** in acceptable and respectful ways.
- Support those on the front lines to access **technology** and do the necessary reporting to ensure programs can be planned accordingly.
- Support **communication** between agencies, ensuring trust and information sharing, while respecting confidentiality of the individuals we are supporting.

LEARNING

- Community meals are far removed from corporate charity, and can thus be more **responsive** and **focused** on the presents needs of their community.
- Addressing **racism**, cultural prejudices, and NIMBYism. Responses and support should be contextualized and take into account each guest's lived experience.
- Learn more about the needs and patterns of the **transient** population.
- Cultivate an understanding and awareness about the unique, traditional, and cultural needs and preferences of **Indigenous** communities in Richmond.
- Ensure frontline staff and volunteers learn about **grief** and **compassionate responses** to the added stress that many vulnerable individuals are living with.

OUTREACH

- **Outreach** to those who cannot come to the established supports – happens by a few but could reach people sooner. Outreach programs will first need to build trust, then connect individuals to services.
- **Trauma informed mental health services** tailored to specific needs of each arena/season.

ONGOING DATA COLLECTION

- We must know that current state of supports, needs, gaps, and how different policies and events (i.e. income assistance rates, the pandemic, or changing weather patterns) affect those who are vulnerable in our neighbourhoods. We aim to next update this report in the summer of 2023, unless there is enough change and uncertainty to warrant revisiting it sooner.

CONCLUSION

During an interview for this report, one of the program staff, referring to both the food they share and the lessons they had learned in this unusual year said, “We keep what we have by giving it away.” The wisdom of this paradox is evident in the abundance of food and collaboration in Richmond, amidst the sober realities of the struggles of those living without adequate food and protective policies. The pandemic has renewed desire for a formalized network of collaboration amongst service providers, and has caused a recognition that charitable food distribution is admirable and necessary as a stopgap response, but does little to address the root causes of food insecurity. The resilience and adaptability of Richmond service providers and their guests alike are the silver lining on our present mutual crisis. The sober reality is that impactful policy development partnered with concrete investments in social infrastructure by the multiple levels of government is still required to tackle the underlying factors leading to food insecurity. In an ideal world, community meals would not be needed, but enjoyed for the joy of it – *to build and bring community together.*

APPENDIX A: FOOD AVAILABLE IN RICHMOND

APPENDIX A

For more information, please contact Hajira Hussain, Executive Director of the Richmond Food Bank at hajira@richmondfoodbank.org.

Organization	In-House Meals/Day or Week	Drop-In Meals/Day or Week	Hampers	Other (i.e. future plans)
UGM Mobile Outreach Van		Bring ~40 bag meals out 1/week		
St. Alban's		Tuesday: ~ 100 (guests + volunteers) 30 take-out meals for Hugh Fridays: 30-35 people Sundays: 100 people (outreach)	22-25 hampers every week in partnership with the Richmond School Board Backpack buddies partnership with School Board over July/Aug to 35 families	
Church On 5		Wednesdays: 80 meals + 31 for Hugh Thursday 85 meals funded by Gilmore Park in collaboration with Urban Bounty		Goal is to return to indoor meals come September A "Quest-like" model for food, clothing, etc.
Kehila Society		~ 200 meals/week between two programs Provide hot lunch/breakfast three times a week to 18 children at the private Jewish day school	Provide some hampers with food and hygiene items to agencies supporting vulnerable individuals	Supply gift cards for groceries, cafes, and clothing, give through outreach workers
St. Joseph's the Worker Parish			Grocery gift cards provided	Re-engage with UGM to discuss and identify gaps and logistics for offering an ongoing food program
Salvation Army Emergency Shelter	3 meals/day for clients in shelter			
Richmond Baptist Church			~50 hampers/week for vulnerable families	Exploring if they should re-start their Saturday meal