# Community-Centered Food Support and Care for All

## Transforming Dignified Food Access in Vancouver

A Convening Grant report from Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

prepared by Sarah Kim (she, her) & Jenny van Enckevort (she, her)

August 20, 2021

The people and organizations named in this report are inquiring into dignified food access on the rightful homelands of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples.

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# Our Community Story

## Background & Intent

In 2019, organizations that provided food banking services were observing how the landscape in Vancouver was changing, largely influenced by the Greater Vancouver Food Bank's relocation to Burnaby, and its reconfiguration of wraparound services (advocacy, education, access to low-cost produce) that had been its hallmark for the previous six years. These organizations recognized the need to convene together and with other organizations offering food access programming to develop collaborative ways of working together to offer food banking and other community-based food security initiatives in ways that centre the inherent agency, creativity, dignity, intellect, and worth of all who need to access charitable food in the city.

Kiwassa Neighbourhood House applied for a City of Vancouver Operational Capacity Building (OCB) Convening Grant (Project Title: Toward Dignified Food Banking in Vancouver) on behalf of the initial group (Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Christ Church Cathedral, Gordon Neighbourhood House, and South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, Jewish Family Services) and was successful in receiving the funding.

The proposed project anticipated creating a shared vision, project plan, and backbone for developing a new approach to food-banking in the city. The anticipated outcomes of the project were:

- Strengthen the network of food bank providers/partners
- Inventory participating organizations' assets for dignified food-banking
- Identify opportunities for strengthening access to / provision of dignified food-banking services in Vancouver
- Articulate next steps for future collaboration and capacity building

### Shifting due to pandemic

The group convened in December 2019 with facilitator Susanna Haas Lyons. Focus areas for collaboration were explored and next steps based on the OCB grant workplan were determined. Please see Appendix B “Dignified Food Access Collaboration Meeting Notes” (page 26) from December 2019 for comprehensive recap.

However due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a State of Emergency declared in B.C. in March 2020, the project was put on pause as the organizations involved pivoted toward emergency food access programming, in response to increased demand and the closure of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank hubs on-site at these organizations.

### New facilitator

Toward the end of 2020, Blain Butyniec, Food Security Coordinator of Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, reached out to Sarah Kim, then Coordinator of the Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks and explained the initial proposal and project and asked if she would like to reconvene and restart the conversations. Sarah adapted the initial proposal based on emerging circumstances of food access amplified by the pandemic and in Spring 2021 was contracted to continue on with the project.

Sarah's proposal included:

- Opening up the conversation regarding accessing food in a dignified way to a broader, yet not-too-large group, of food justice advocates to deepen relationships and explore how ways to implement procedures and policies of dignified food access, with the understanding that there are many factors that determine what defines dignified food access based on the populations served
- Three meetings with the group of food justice advocates
- Co-facilitation with different food justice facilitators for each conversation
- Engaging with community members who have lived experiences of accessing food supports through interviews (referred to in this report as our team of community members)

The goal and outcomes of the conversations would continue to be similar to those outlined in the initial proposal for the OCB Convening Grant, and included the creation of recommendations and best practices for dignified food access that could be shared with organizations across Vancouver and B.C.

# Dignified Food Access Sessions

Sarah convened a group of 13 food justice advocates working at organizations serving diverse populations across Vancouver (see pages 22-23 for the names and affiliations of our team members). We met once a month over three months to discuss, unpack, and move toward a vision of creating more dignified approaches to food access programs.

Guiding questions that led these conversations were:

- What does dignified food access look like? What are the practices?
- How might we offer dignified food access services in the City of Vancouver?

**Session 1** | co-facilitated by Zsuzsi Fodor, Independent Consultant

The goals of our first session together were to:

- create opportunities for the food justice advocates to get to know each other. Although the food security world in Vancouver is small, we do not all know each other and our work
- identify the important elements of what dignified food access is and looks like, and
- map existing principles/policies/philosophies related to dignified food access programming.

**Session 2** | co-facilitated by Crecien Bencio, Independent Consultant

In our second session together, we asked food justice advocates to:

- identify the barriers, challenges and gaps that their organization faces in providing dignified food access programs, whether they are within their organization, relationships with partners, funders, participants
- to provide recommendations that could remedy the challenges identified broken down into specific groupings: Government, Funders, Internally, External Partners/Organizations, Additional Recommendations

**Session 3** | co-facilitated by Aaren Topley, Public Health Association of BC (PHABC)

In our third and final session, we dove deeper into three recommendation themes that emerged from Sessions 1 & 2. Food justice advocates were asked to unpack a theme by responding to the questions:

- How do you know this is being actualized? What does it look like?
- What actions need to happen for this to be actualized?

- Who is responsible and for what?

Lastly, we discussed our collective vision based on the findings and emergences from the previous inquiries.

**Interviews** | We spoke with our team of community members to learn about their experiences accessing food assistance programs in Vancouver (see pages 22-23 for the names and affiliations of our team of community members).

# Why Dignified Food Access Matters

Our work is informed by the City of Vancouver's Food Charter, specifically in recognizing "access to safe, sufficient, culturally appropriate and nutritious food as a basic human right for all Vancouver residents" and in reflecting "the dialogue between the community, government, and all sectors of the food system" (vancouver.ca/files/cov/Van_Food_Charter.pdf). Our work is further informed by the Right to Food principles outlined by the United Nations as the right to have **regular, permanent and unrestricted access** to adequate and sufficient food that is culturally appropriate, and which ensures a **physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear** (ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/AboutHRFood.aspx).

Throughout this report, we share perspectives from our team of community members and food justice advocates. The story we share below reflects a range of experiences that are relatable to countless people. When we don't work together to understand dignified food access, the help we provide can actually harm our neighbours.

## Our Voices: sharai's Story

I'll never forget the time, that time, the very first time that I had to go to the food bank. I remember the shame. I remember crying in the lineup.

The process of going to the food bank was really humiliating. They want to know... I don't remember all the questions, but it was very invasive, really getting into personal stuff that I don't think they need to know. It's like, I don't have any food. And I have children. What's the problem here?

I remember always feeling extremely emotional. Like, you know, the lump in my throat, being on the verge of the tears. I don't *want* to say it's terrible, but I think it's wrong, that we have to go and get soup from so many different places.

The food should be in our homes. It should be healthy. It should be what is good for our particular needs. Because when you go to these various places, you're getting what they give you, right? You don't get to pick. You're eating stuff that might not make you feel good.

I have gluten intolerance, like pretty serious. So can you imagine what that was like, for me going to those places and eating at these places? It was not good, but I had to eat. So it was like, "Well, do I want to have a stomachache and the horrible bowel issues? Or, do I want to starve?" Because those were the two options.

As somebody who has accessed programs, and meals and stuff like that, it was always humiliating. Always, every time, without fail. I would say to myself, "I'm entitled to this, right?" I was embarrassed. I thought "I can't take care of myself. I'm poor, therefore, I'm not worthy to have what I need."

I'm not on welfare now. I'm on Employment Insurance, which isn't a lot of money. Fortunately for us, my husband is working, but it's hard. And I will never go to the food bank.

I was telling my husband the other day, because we were running low and stuff. And he was like, "Should we go to the food bank?" And then I was like, "Do you know? Do you know what that takes? Like, we're gonna have to write down really personal information. And I don't even know if they'll let us because we're married." There's this patriarchal thing about that, too (with social assistance). I don't even know what the requirements are anymore. But it's a process, and it's not a fun process. It's really humiliating and disempowering."

sharai mustatia (they, them), Community Member

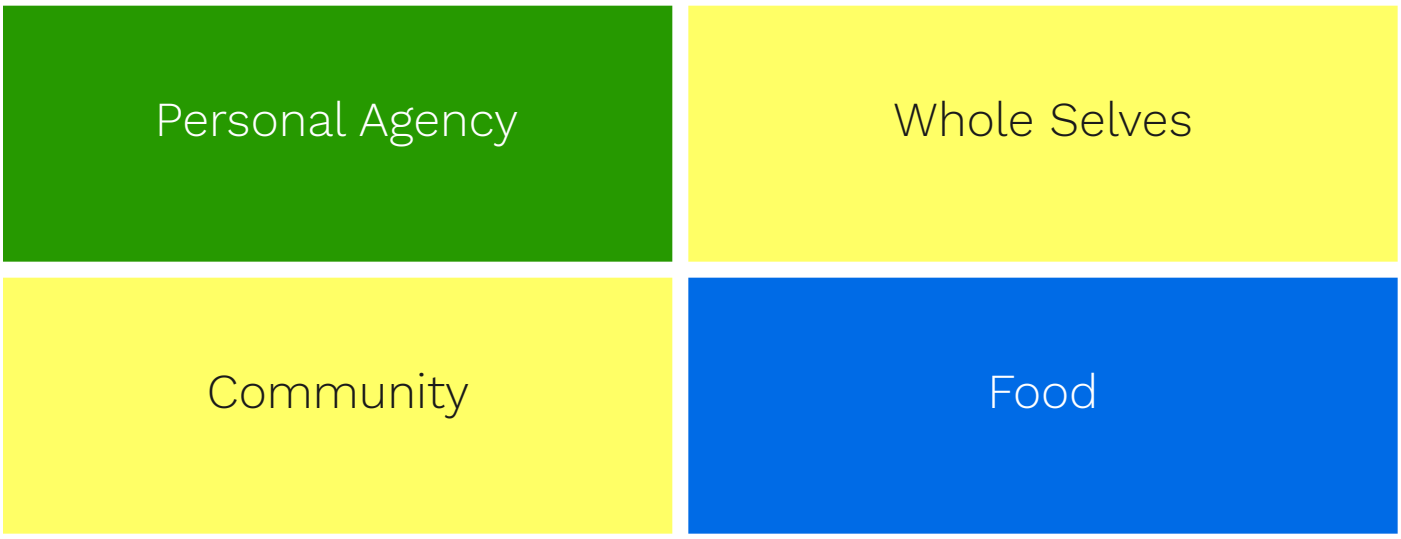
Among the many barriers sharai names in accessing food with dignity, their story demonstrates the lasting impacts that dehumanizing experiences can have on people seeking support. Distrust with systems and organizations can be deep-seated, even once changes are made. In order to fulfill the goals of Vancouver's Food Charter and meet the threshold for the United Nations' Right to Food, we need to center the voices of people with lived experience accessing food supports, and those working on the front lines to provide dignified food access. In this report, we share the challenges, recommendations and solutions provided by both groups.

# Our Findings

## “I know we/I provided dignified food access when...”

When we asked our team of food justice professionals how they know when they’ve provided dignified food access, four key themes emerged:

### Key themes from our team of food justice advocates




**Personal Agency** | We see participants most engaged when we include them in how our whole programs are run, when they have a say in removing barriers to access, and especially when they are contributing to their communities.

**Whole Selves** | We see people thriving when they can express themselves and their needs freely and without fear. Sometimes part of this self-expression involves opting out of programs that do not treat participants as whole people.

**Community** | We see the benefits of an approach that is more relational, and less transactional, with a focus on building social support and care, through activities like socializing, recipe-sharing and storytelling.

**Food** | We see that participants are happiest with food that is fresh, healthy, comforting and familiar.

One participant from DTES-Response found the term dignified food access to be "aggravating" because they couldn't relate to that language. In our discussions with food justice advocates and our team of community members, we have tried to shift our focus to be participant-centered, with an emphasis on personal agency and whole selves.

## Mapping Dignified Food Access

We asked our team of food justice advocates to collectively map the existing policies, procedures and practices around dignified food access programs and services in Vancouver.

One of the major challenges our team identified during this project was the lack of existing dignified food access policies and procedures within our city.

In speaking with food justice advocates and our team of community members, we also recognized significant challenges that are specific to the food banking model of providing food assistance. In our work together, we have focused on ways to transform beyond food banking, toward more community-centered programs and services.

### Policies & Procedures

Few current policies and procedures came to mind for our team within our organizations, though we looked to some internal and external sources. Our team noted that the City of Vancouver Food Strategy, in particular, needs to be updated (vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancouvers-food-strategy.aspx).

**Internal**

- Christ Church Cathedral has their own Food Philosophy (2019): www.thecathedral.ca/about/food-philosophy

**External**

- South Vancouver Neighbourhood House follows the Good Food Principles set out by Community Food Centres of Canada (CFCC) in 2017: cfccanada.ca/CFCC/media/assets/GFO-Good-Food-Principles-w-examples-2017_1.pdf
- Gordon Neighbourhood House has a Right to Food philosophy: gordonhouse.org/about-gordon-neighbourhood-house/right-to-food
- Disability justice principles and resources (e.g., those listed by the BC Teachers' Federation): bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=54220)

- FoodShare Toronto provides a guide to understanding food insecurity and food justice through many lenses: https://foodshare.net/about/food-justice/

## Practices

Significantly, our organizations have many good practices to share, which lead to our key recommendations (detailed on pages 15-20):

- **Jewish Family Services** (JFS) works to provide culturally appropriate foods through Kosher meals. To minimize barriers between volunteers and those accessing food services, they are creating a survey for input from the entire community being served by JFS. They are also shifting toward an ordering system for food hampers, to provide community members with more choice, and plan to create seven food hubs in Metro Vancouver.

- **Watari** is providing food delivery to folks who have tested positive for COVID, with options to provide culturally familiar foods. They are working with HandyDart, and do not require participants to provide proof of income.

- **South Vancouver Neighbourhood House** has a dedicated community navigator who asks new participants about their food preferences and dietary needs, inviting people to voluntarily share information about their family members' needs. From a wholistic perspective, beyond food access, the community navigator connects participants with supports like settlement and employment services.

- **The South Vancouver Neighbourhood House** food hub prioritizes relationship-building and community engagement, with food as an entryway to the neighbourhood house. Since opening in January 2021, they are now inviting feedback from participants about the types of foods and services they are providing.

- **Hogan's Alley Society** practices cultural sovereignty by bringing culturally-connected meals to the community.

- **Christ Church Cathedral** offered sit-down meals where volunteer servers would also sit down to share food with participants, before COVID. They have shifted to offering meals to go, and some people now eat together outdoors. The result has been people forming friendships during these weekly events.

# Challenges to Dignified Food Access

One of the major challenges identified by our team of food justice advocates was the lack of existing dignified food access policies and procedures within our city. Our team of community members also shared their challenges as recipients of food assistance.

## Challenges Identified by Community Members

While our team of community members expressed gratitude and appreciation for the help they've received to put food on the table, they also opened up about the ways that programs impact feelings of dignity, and often perpetuate barriers to access:

- Standing in long lineups, even when times are pre-scheduled
- Standing in lineups without a place to sit down, especially for people with disabilities
- Physical and social-emotional challenges with grocery shopping, or picking up food from donation locations, for people with disabilities
- Transportation to grocery stores or food assistance locations takes time and money, and increases risk of COVID transmission
- Travelling to access food assistance from locations far from home—alone or with children—is challenging for many participants
- Receiving donated food waste, such as spoiled broccoli or rancid peanut butter
- Losing the independence to provide for selves, and family
- Lack of choice when it comes to foods that are nutritious for individual diets (allergies, health needs, etc.)
- Lack of culturally familiar foods and feelings of alienation from home
- Racism, prejudice and power dynamics play a role in feelings of safety and dignity for participants accessing food assistance
- Requirement to provide proof of income, and respond to other invasive, personal questions in order to access life-sustaining food supports
- Feelings of shame and decreased self-worth are increased because of these challenges

## Challenges Identified by Food Justice Advocates

Some of the challenges described are specific to COVID, yet they also highlight underlying issues we've been facing in our systems even before the pandemic.

**Pre-Existing Challenges: Culture, Capacity, Funding**

- Community members have a lack of trust in organizations due to poor past experiences or lack of staff cultural competency
- Scarcity of resources has meant that food quality has often been sacrificed in order to meet the need for quantity and to reflect cultural foods of participants.
- Changing the charity mindset and introducing new things is hard in faith-based organizations, especially when a program has been running for 20-30 years.
- Learning how to balance the safety and comfort of community members with complex intersecting needs. Poverty can intersect with mental illness and drug use; many people who are poor are also criminalized. In these contexts, there are significant barriers to facilitating safe access to food programming for all who need it.
- Providing culturally appropriate food supply and fresh, healthy produce is difficult—especially when the majority of donated food is canned.
- Expanding the definition of the types of supports organizations provide beyond food, to include formula, diapers, and other essential supplies.
- Space concerns for offering dignified food access programs include expensive rent and appropriate infrastructure, like refrigeration, etc.
- Many service organizations provide a wide scope of services to community members, and may not fall entirely under targeted funding portfolios
- The advocacy work required by front-line service providers to highlight these issues is necessary, but interferes with the capacity to carry out the work of providing dignified food support
- Funding is definitely a barrier!
- When one program or food hubs closes or shrinks, where do people go? Will they have to travel even longer distances? Do neighbouring programs have the capacity to support more community members?
- Travelling far distances to access food was an issue for many before the pandemic, but now affects far more community members—especially those with children, people in quarantine, and folks with chronic illness or additional barriers

**COVID Challenges: Power Imbalance, Disconnection, Regaining & Sustaining Capacity**

- COVID means rules, which feels like a power imbalance. We are imposing our rules on community members participating in food programs, and this has to be balanced with the need for a felt sense of safety for community members.
- At food markets during COVID, the requirement for lineups with social distancing takes away from the feeling of a food market. People are coming very early, and sometimes the food runs out. The setup is very challenging and feels very much like a food bank.
- Even with technology during COVID, meeting online for community kitchens feels very distanced and the important act of sharing food isn't possible.
- Funding for programs is erratic, and although it's specific to food, it's not specific to dignified food access. There is a focus on providing goods, without considering the importance of the processes for providing food support.
- Due to spacing concerns during COVID, the number of programs have decreased, but the need has increased. For many organizations, there has been a shift from relationship-focused support to transactional food assistance.
- Some programs have grown during COVID, but it's unclear whether it will be sustainable to continue operating at the same capacity.
- Being able to offer culturally specific foods during COVID is challenging in many ways. There is a lack of space for safe gathering and food preparation, and our chefs are maxed out from cooking meals at home. This also means food prices have increased, and now we have to provide prepared meals with closed lids, which defeats the dignity of choice. There is also a lack of access to computers for the online programs we're now offering. We've gone from a group of ten to a group of three, but the need hasn't decreased.
- For Hogan's Alley Society, which advocates for Black Vancouverites, 2020 had a big focus on Black lives, issues and needs resulting in donations of items, time and money. Some families were further impacted by COVID in terms of poor health, job loss, housing insecurity and financial barriers. In this heightened state of loss, food justice is deeply negatively impacted. In 2021, many racialized families still have the same needs but there is less funding being offered, and there are fewer volunteers available as people return to activities that were prohibited during COVID.

# Our Voices: Challenges Faced by our Team

of food justice advocates and community members

"Staff and volunteers at the Greater Vancouver Food Bank were not friendly nor accommodating. I have challenges with my body and am unable to wait in long lineups. I mentioned this to the staff and volunteers and they said I would need a note from my doctor if I had physical challenges with waiting in line."

Shaista (she, her), Community Member
Strathcona Community Centre Backpack Program

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"It's hard for me because I used to be independent, and suddenly I'm not. I am the only one taking care of my two kids (age 4 and 7), and I am grateful for receiving food because it helps me. For those of us receiving expired food, it makes us feel like second-class citizens when people are dumping their food waste on us. If I receive broccoli that's already turning yellow or peanut butter that's expired, it's a waste of energy to carry heavy food home, where it will end up in the garbage."

Mhrojeel Atasen (she, her), Community Member
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House

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"I used to work in social services, and it was eye-opening when I went from referring people to services to receiving the services myself. I appreciate the food I receive but some of it was bad for my health and I didn't have any choice. The food bank staff were kind, and there was no negative attitude toward me for receiving the service. But living with Parkinson's disease and having to wait in a long lineup is challenging. It's hard to be around food recipients who are stressed out, and yelling at each other and at me when I don't know the right place to stand."

Sheila Sherban (she, her), Community Member
Grandview-Woodland Food Connection

”Being able to offer culturally specific foods during COVID is challenging in many ways. There is a lack of space for safe gathering and food preparation, and our chefs are maxed out from cooking meals at home. This also means food prices have increased, and now we have to provide prepared meals with closed lids, which defeats the dignity of choice.

There is also a lack of access to computers for the online programs we're now offering. We've gone from a group of ten to a group of three, but the need hasn't decreased.“

Sioban Barker (Sio, they, she), Food Justice Advocate
Hogan's Alley Society

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”COVID means rules, which feels like a power imbalance. We are imposing our rules on community members participating in food programs, and this has to be balanced with the need for a felt sense of safety for community members.”

Khalid Jamal (he, him), Food Justice Advocate
Strathcona Community Centre

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”Funding for programs is erratic, and although it's specific to food, it's not specific to dignified food access. There is a focus on providing goods, without considering the importance of the processes for providing food support.”

Blain Butyniec (he, him), Food Justice Advocate
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

# Our Recommendations

In light of the widespread challenges to providing dignified food access in Vancouver, our team of community members and food justice advocates drew on their lived experiences to share recommendations to improve systems and programs.

Specifically, we are focused on moving beyond food banking to change the ways we think about and provide dignified food access focused on the needs of community members.

## Key Recommendations from Community Members

We asked our team of community members for their recommendations to improve food access that prioritizes participants' personal agency, whole selves, community connections, and quality food. Align with expressing appreciation for receiving some support, they made the following requests:

- Community kitchens, to build relationships and connections, and combat the charity mindset while easing isolation and loneliness.
- Garden space provided by the City of Vancouver for all apartment-dwellers who want to grow their own food. We need to ask how to make this happen, instead of asking why.
- Universal basic income could really help, or better wages. You need $25/hour in Vancouver to afford a one-bedroom apartment.
- Provide gift cards every 3-4 months. This could be an easier solution than organizations having to source and even purchase food. People could make their own choices when provided a gift card.
- When programs are established, especially emergency relief programs, they offer great supports to participants and start to establish expectations. All of a sudden, programs stop without any warning and notice and participants are left struggling. Programs need support to keep helping participants.
- Offering food support programs consistently, over long periods of time, without eliminating programs and leaving community members in need
- More nutritious food and fresh food
- Foods that meet people's dietary needs and restrictions
- More choices offered, to meet people's needs and capacity to prepare specific foods while they are still fresh

- Eliminate food waste (expired produce and packaged foods) from donations to community members
- Building relationships and connections between people at organizations providing assistance and community members receiving supports
- Food programs that offer additional supports. Shannon provided an example of a food program that brought mothers who were grieving together to cook and eat meals together and counselling support was also offered.

## Key Recommendations from Food Justice Advocates

We asked our team of food justice advocates for their recommendations to transform dignified food access. The three major considerations are:

**Multi-Year Core Funding** with flexibility on how to spend funds | Moving away from the charity-industrial complex could involve cultivating and strengthening relationships between funders and applicants, with the ability to pivot funding when changes arise and responsiveness is needed. Our team seeks to promote mentorship over competition, increasing access for smaller, nimble organizations without charitable or non-profit status. We believe greater fluidity in reporting requirements, with regular updates instead of a single report at the end of each project would benefit everyone, including funders but especially community members and organizations delivering programs and services. From our perspectives, building accountability between funders and organizations

through relational (not transactional) models, could increase clarity around expectations and promote integrity.

**Agency for Community Members** | Our team recognizes that when community members are given ownership of programs and services, people feel a greater sense of connection and agency. This recommendation includes providing opportunities to give feedback in equitable ways, understanding barriers to participation to ensuring everyone has access to participate. We are hopeful that changing COVID safety measures will increase opportunities for community members and service providers to connect in person.

**Cultural Safety Training** | Our team would like to see service providers receive training on how to address language barriers, understand the importance of culturally familiar foods, and pay attention to the services people want to see offered in their communities. We recognize that organizational staff are responsible for setting the ground rules, establishing hiring practices and training volunteers, and that understanding peoples' lived experiences and how to respond skilfully is critical to the health and wellbeing of community members.

For a complete list of recommendations for government, funders, organizations, organizational partners, and more, please see Appendix A (page 24).

## Transforming to Just and Dignified Food Systems, Beyond Food Banking

Our team of community members and food justice advocates would like to move beyond food banking, toward a system that provides stability, choice, and responsiveness to the unique needs of each community.

**Our food justice advocates ask the City of Vancouver to provide multi-year core funding and operational support**, in collaboration with the organizations doing this work, and integrating elements of transforming dignified food access as described within this report. This process should center the voices of those most impacted by poverty and food insecurity, particularly Black and Indigenous communities, and newcomers to Vancouver—particularly immigrants, migrants and refugees.

This urging is based on the Vancouver City Social Indicators Profile from 2020, showing that 20% of Vancouverites lived below the poverty line in 2016, but the numbers increased disproportionately for Black people (26%), for Indigenous people (41%), and for new immigrants and non-permanent residents (40%).

# Our Voices: Solutions from our Team

of food justice advocates and community members

"The personal connection I had with Ian (a staff member) made me feel really good, when he called me every week to ask how I was doing and to set up the next delivery. Having food delivered to me is very helpful, because grocery shopping is very difficult for me with my budget and health issues. I appreciate having a choice of foods, and receiving things I'm not allergic to. The freshness and variety also makes a difference, because the food I'm putting into my body matters for my health."

Sheila Sherban (she, her), Community Member
Grandview-Woodland Food Connection

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"If I'm given privilege or good fortune in the future, I want to help other people but, I have to make sure I treat people in ways that help them feel good about themselves. People donating food should understand that it makes people feel bad about themselves when they receive spoiled food. It's better to have lots of options available that people can choose from, or to personalize it so people can request the types of foods they want. I would feel really good about it because I would get the things I really need, and it would help me feel valued."

Mhrojeel Atasen (she, her), Community Member
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House

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"When programs are established, especially emergency relief programs, they offer great supports to participants and start to establish expectations. All of a sudden, programs stop without any warning and notice and participants are left struggling. Programs need support to keep helping participants."

Shannon (she, her), Community Member
Strathcona Community Centre Backpack Program

"Provide gift cards every 3-4 months. This could be an easier solution than organizations having to source and even purchase food. People could make their own choices when provided a gift card."

G.M. Legese (he, him), Community Member
Strathcona Community Centre Backpack Program

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"We need things like community kitchens, and I don't mean community kitchens for charity. It was this camaraderie as well of all these people getting together and creating these meals together. Which was really impactful for me, because it just reinforced my love of doing community. I mean just people getting together and sharing the work in a kitchen and then sharing the meal. Yeah, I wish we could get the charity part out of it and just get together and help each other cook and eat together. Because everybody's lonely."

sharai mustatia (they, them), Community Member

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"If you removed the word 'food' from any part of what we've shared, our recommendations could apply to any community service type of work. So we're actually talking about systems, and how we can actually change not the food systems, but the greater social systems involved in the ways we do community work, and nonprofit work, and beyond that as well."

Joey Liu (she, her), Food Justice Advocate
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House

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"There are such a broad range of problems from the systems level to programs levels, but that means there are also a broad range of solutions to increase dignified access to food at many levels."

Khalid Jamal, Food Justice Advocate
Strathcona Communtiy Centre

"These conversations show our interconnectedness. We can see the inequities, but also we do have solutions in this group. I feel like we can learn from one another to support communities who have just gotten into this awareness of supporting themselves through food."

Kor Kase (he, him), Food Justice Advocate
Afro Van Connect

## Vision

We asked our team of food justice advocates to envision our recommendations being put into action, and what success would look like in three year's time. Key highlights of our visions in action include:

- Indigenous foodways returning to Coast Salish territories
- Changing food systems from the community up
- Creating a society of care and connection

The central themes of our collective work include: connecting to the land; community of care, and; relationships at the foundation of our work.

Our key recommendations (page 15-20) name the solutions we need to be implementing now, in order to change our culture and systems, so we can realize our vision. In three years, this is what dignified food access in Vancouver can look like:

- We are connecting to the land from our diverse cultures, with funding to engage the support of elders and knowledge-keepers. We are connecting to the land and caring for each other, creating new values.
- Food programs are now offered from a place of abundance, instead of scarcity.
- Community members are shaping food programs and services, moving toward food sovereignty. We continue building relationships and connections, and engage our communities through meaningful conversations.
- Long-term core funding for dignified food access is secured, and people delivering programs don't need to spend time and energy being stressed about finding money.

- Organizations are working together and collaborating in centralized and more efficient ways, yet our individual work is decentralized to respond to each community's needs.
- We have developed collective awareness, and the ability to provide support beyond our core communities.

# Conclusion

The Vancouver Food Charter (vancouver.ca/files/cov/Van_Food_Charter.pdf) states that "in a food-secure community, the distribution of healthy, safe food is socially just. Community food security needs the involvement of all members of our community, including citizens, consumers, businesses and governments. When citizens are engaged in dialogue and action around food security, and governments are responsive to their communities' concerns and recommendations, sound food policy can be developed and implemented in all sectors of the food system and the community."

Through the OCB Convening Grant, we've engaged a passionate group of community members who have expertise with food access in Vancouver: Those with lived experience, and those working in leadership and on the front lines of food support programs. What is needed now is for governments and funders to create "sound food policy" to transform dignified food access in Vancouver, as it is apparent that there are many barriers in delivering and accessing affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food.

We wish to include everyone who reads this report in actualizing our vision of transforming dignified food access through: Indigenous foodways returning to Coast Salish territories, changing food systems from the community up and creating a society of care and connection. Together, we can create a future where everyone living in the City of Vancouver has dignified access to food—with agency, in community, and as their whole selves.

# Our Team

We are a team of participants receiving food support, and professionals working in food justice spaces throughout the City of Vancouver and British Columbia.

Aaren Topley (he, him)

**Dignified Food Access Project Co-Facilitator** | Public Health Association of BC (PHABC)

Blain Butyniec (he, him)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House

Christina Lee 李嘉明 (she, they)

**Food Justice Advocate**
hua foundation

Crecien Bencio (he, him)

**Dignified Food Access Project Co-Facilitator**
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Eloina Alberto (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Watari Counselling and Support Services Society

G.M. Legese (he, him)

**Community Member**
Strathcona Community Centre Backpack Program

Janelle Zwarych (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Jewish Family Services

Jenny van Enckevort (she, her)

**Dignified Food Access Project Reporting** | Earth to Jenny Communications

Jill Ratcliffe (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
SRO-Collaborative

Joey Liu 廖星遥 (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House

Khalid Jamal (he, him)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Strathcona Community Centre Food Security Program

Kor Kase (he, him)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Afro Van Connect

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Raghad Alkhagha (she, her)

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Shaista (she, her)

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**Community Member**

Sheila Sherban (she, her)

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Grandview-Woodland
Food Connection

Siobhan Barker (Sio, they, she)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Hogan's Alley Society

Tintin Yang (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Downtown Eastside
Neighbourhood House

Vienne Chan (she, her)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Christ Church Cathedral

WY Tsang 泳伃 (they, she)

**Food Justice Advocate**
Independant Consultant

Zsuzsi Fodor (she, her)

**Dignified Food Access Project Co-Facilitator**
Food Justice, Facilitation & Adaptive Strategy

# Appendix A:

# Complete list of recommendations

## from our team of food justice advocates

**Government**

- More support for the small food programs
- don't take community based food programs for granted
- prioritize smaller programs/ initiatives
- Redefine success from #s to more justice and dignified systems
- Continued Government support for programs 'post-COVID' initiatives that recognize that loss of job, finances, mental health impacts
- Less intensive grant applications
- promotion of awareness of the importance of culturally relevant foods
- providing support for organizations who are developing etho-cultural food hubs
- Acknowledgement of systemic barriers

**Funders**

- Allow for flexibility and diversity in what can be funded; establish a relationship that allows for the program to be iterative. For example, a food program doesn't just need money for food; we need staffing hours, supplies etc.
- Fund more staffing costs
- Can city provide funding to facilitate learnings for orgs to create food charters
- Long-term funding
- Multi-year funding that supports orgs/programs to be sustainable (instead of one-time trends), even for smaller programs
- Allow funding with a vision on sustainability and understand the importance of long-term planning

- Support for programs 'post-COVID' initiatives that recognize that loss of job, finances, mental health impacts

**Internal Recommendations for Organizations**

- Increase cultural and language competency
- Transportation
- Tools to support sustainable engagement
- Providing community members compensation for their work
- Involve participants in as much program planning and operations as possible
- Find alternative food acquisition sources and solidify existing collaborations
- Allocate food budget to the items community members have asked to see in their food boxes
- Post COVID food literacy programs and initiatives

**External Partners/Organizations**

- Remove means testing as a requirement for program participation
- Advocacy support from external orgs so that service orgs can direct limited capacity towards clients
- Spend time with spokes/partners to share values and principles.
- Rescued food: develop relationships with food rescue orgs to communicate standards with grocery stores and businesses. How to support this work so it isn't burdensome for non-profits/businesses and less healthy/fresh for members?
- Let's partner!
- Partnering in building programs that better address the loss of live in-person community building while respecting current protocols

**Additional Recommendations**

- Free, accessible training on trauma-informed practice, cultural competency, anti-oppression for all levels of staff, volunteers that can be provided at every organization
- Move towards more robust support structures (paid sick leave, universal basic income, etc.) so that food programs are not even needed

# DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS COLLABORATION

## •DECEMBER 2019 MEETING •

SUSANNA HAAS LYONS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

# Meeting Overview

## Purpose

Participants worked toward a shared vision for strengthening the offerings of dignified food banking services in the city of Vancouver. They also identified and planned for next steps, including meeting submission requirements for a City of Vancouver convening grant.

This was the third meeting with local organizations committed to dignified food access in Vancouver.

## Meeting Objectives

- Foster shared understanding about the COV grant
- Explore possible focus areas for collaboration, leveraging the interests and assets of each organization
- Refine COV grant work plan, identify individuals to complete it for mid-
- Determine next steps including leads and timeline for each critical task

## Participants

Andrew Stephens-Rennie, Christ Church Cathedral
Alberto Jaramillo, Christ Church Cathedral
Ilana Labow, Jewish Family Services
Tanja Demajo, Jewish Family Services
Joey Liu, Gordon Neighbourhood House
Blain Butyniec, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
Dorla Tune, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House
Zahra Esmail, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House

## Facilitator

Susanna Haas Lyons, Civic Engagement Specialist

## I know I've/we've provided dignified food service when...

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and describe something that helps them know when they or their organization has provided dignified food services:

- Guests feel a sense of belonging and buy-in to the program
- People are singing, there is joy in the room
- Folks we designed the programs for show up as leaders, feel inspired, come back
- People see themselves reflected in the meals provided
- I feel it
- People plug in and participate in a variety of ways
- We offer what they asked for, we respond to feedback, resulting in program changes and then how they participate
- Guests say thank you, connect with me, share their story
- What we provide doesn't feel "free" or a "handout"

These ideas can be revisited to during the work of collaboration, to help guide a vision of success.

## COV Grant Update

Dorla and Blain shared context and updates about the grant. Key points:

- Written in response to this group's spring meeting; led by Kiwassa
- The CoV describes the grant's purpose as, to support "non-profit organizations in improving their ability to deliver social services, to address social issues, and to navigate change." [1]
- Report is due in October
- Supports 6 meetings
- Updated budget is due Monday December 16, 2019

[1] See pages 4&5 of this overview for the City's theory of change.
https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/organizational-capacity-building-convening-grant-information-sheet.pdf

# Criteria for selecting a collaboration opportunity

Participants offered the following criteria to help to evaluate the various collaboration opportunities (see the following section). Summary headings are written by the facilitator.

### Exciting

- Excites us, makes us want to continue. It's worth (and exciting to) talk about
- Has a clear impact that we want to make

### Community informed / driven

- Driven by the people making use of our services. Puts residents and lived experience at the centre. Inclusion of participants.

### Achievable

- Achievable. The idea can be realistically pursued (even if unsuccessful in the end)
- Realistic timelines and expectations for participation. True to our capacity
- Something we can all agree to do together

### Aligned with our organizations

- Complements existing work of our organizations. Organizational alignment and appetite to participate. Aligns with our capacity and values.
- Commitment of senior leadership to supporting the project publicly

### Potential for impact

- Will affect more than my programs. Can create changes beyond my organization. Has the potential for creating meaningful change
- Scalable
- Something that we could not pull off  on our own. Leverages shared resources

### Unique offering

- Not reinventing the wheel. Provides something new or strengthens something with potential. It's not replicating something that already exists here
- It's not about replacing the GVFB

### Responsive to our organizations

- Appropriate for diverse neighbourhood houses and other participating organizations

### Honest about our process

- Models vulnerability, honesty, and we acknowledge what's not working

## Ideas for our collaboration

The following ideas were raised as opportunities to consider pursuing to improve the provision of dignified food access in Vancouver.

NOTE: Participating organizations will review these ideas with their colleagues and meet by phone in late January to refine the focus for collaboration. The preceding list of criteria should be considered in prioritizing the ideas listed here, and new ones that come forward.

| Programs | Strengthening our Network | Systems Change |
|---|---|---|
| Increase availability (locations, hours) of food security programs and services<br><br>Establish a low-cost food market<br><br>Establish a food center<br><br>Establish a "client choice grocery store"<br><br>Support neighbour to neighbour connections, build capacity locally | Develop a community of practice[1]<br><br>Work towards alignment and progress in agency policies in organizational cultures. Equity, diversity, inclusion. Social justice. Accessibility.<br><br>Enhance a distributed model of Community Food Services, by sharing resources. Develop Funding and Staffing models to support common goals (e.g. job shares) | Address root causes of food insecurity and poverty<br><br>Advocate for policy change and foundation investment. e.g. farmer tax deduction for donated produce, recovery food program coordination among agencies<br><br>Address and foster dialogue about racism and oppression of food security users<br><br>Offer a clear strong voice in the media and public sphere about these issues, amplify voices<br><br>Establish a new foundation focused on dignified food access<br><br>Highlight and address the connection between food security and health and housing affordability. Activate the real estate industry |

[1] see Appendix for October meeting notes

## Next steps

Focus our work and documents on "dignified food access" rather than "dignified food banking"

### Each participant

- Solicit colleagues' input on a vision for this collaboration's work
- Consider how dignified services show up across all organizational programs, and relation to this effort about food access
- Prepare for check-in call in late January, where each organization will be asked to identify the (a) *focus* for collaboration (program, network strengthening, systems change) and, as appropriate, (b) *specific project concepts of interest*

### Timeline

For each step, assume person hours for: planning, administration and logistics, participating, reporting

*December*. Planning meeting

*Late January*. check-in call. To be organized by Andrew

- Report back on work to establish a shared vision for this collaboration

*February*. Meeting #1 (planning)

- Clarify focus for collaboration[2] (program, network strengthening, systems change) and specific project concept
- Also discuss how to conduct upcoming meetings. Who will organize the meeting logistics and administration (who has capacity? Is there an honoraria)? When is a facilitator useful?

*Spring*:

- Involving others
- listening to our guest and clients
- articulating division
- defining the opportunity
- defining next steps

*October*. Report due

[2] The program focus could alternatively be developed through collaborating with colleagues and program participants, with the benefit of improved resonance and responsiveness and the drawback of spending much of the grant on the 'what' rather than the 'how'.

## Appendix 1: Meeting Evaluation (Dec 13)

**Discussions focussed on the right topics:** 78% agree, 12% neutral
**I thought this was a valuable meeting**: 75% agree or strongly agree, 25% neutral
**Participants were the right people for these conversations:** 75% agree or strongly agree, 25% neutral

**1. Is there anything you'd like to say about increasing the provision of dignified food access in Vancouver that you didn't have a chance to share today?**

- Just to emphasize the importance of the vision for the dignified food access
- We just received funding to do some of this type of listening and exploring with our organization. But we are being mindful about agreeing to do more next year
- I'm really interested in what community food centres might look like through this model of collaboration

**2. What was most valuable to you about this workshop?**

- Facilitated Workshop support. Moving towards clarifying purpose and intention
- Spending time together
- Being able to come together to explore what our possible shared work might be
- Learn where different agencies are on this topic
- Hearing from/ discussing with peers working in Food Systems/ Community Development to have similar values. I feel with this group there is desire/ vision to do something tangible together
- Connection, casting vision, and moving beyond a food bank model
- The presence of senior leadership

**3. What suggestions do you have for future meetings?**

- Continued improvement on designing achievable agendas
- We need to make some decisions
- Just to keep this space of building trust and openness
- Food like today's!!
- Facilitator helps keep meeting on track to finish on time
- Make sure that they are facilitated by someone outside the group to help us all participate

**Who else should be involved in these discussions?**

- Senior leadership from each org; At some point leadership (decision makers)
- Neighbourhood Food Networks
- Food policy Council
- Businesses?

# Appendix 2: Potential for collaboration (October Meeting)

When asked "What could this group *do together* to advance the state of dignified food banking in Vancouver, that we can't do alone?" participants discussed opportunities to collaborate, barriers and capacities their organizations bring.

## Focus for collaboration

GVFB offers valuable food and volunteers to run food banks across the City. However, their model doesn't invest in dignified aspects of food access.

The opportunity for this group is to support one another to create and provide add-ons to increase the *dignified* experience of people using food banks and related services.

Workshop participants identified that the opportunity to collaborate goes beyond a food bank model. The work of strengthening dignified food access will:

- Integrate into programming and services
- Build a community of practice
- Foster partnerships to develop and deliver dignified food access experiences

## Opportunities to collaborate

- Develop a **community of practice** to share and learn internally
    - Promising practices
    - Develop collective impact activities
    - Demonstrate impact
    - Pilot promising practices across the region
    - Develop strategies together and ideas for wraparound services
- Staff training and sharing to foster **organizational cultures** that advance a dignified food approach
    - Support one another's internal systems development, for example anti-racism policies, that could be shared amongst organizations

- **Apply for grants** together

- **Communicate with one another about GVFB** messages and plans
- **Advocate** with one voice to GVFB
- Inform GVFB volunteers who show up to run the food banks about dignified food practices

- **Restart partnerships** that have not been continued by the GVFB

- **Look for efficiencies** in providing food access, for organizations that aren't working with the GVFB on food banking
    - Purchase produce at a wholesale prices together
    - Share storage space in infrastructure

## Barriers to strengthening dignified food access

- **Lack of time and staff** to do this work
- GVFB has changed its orientation towards dignified food access, it was a priority in recent years but no longer seems to be