

Food For Thought!

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Food is an important and vital part of individual, family and community life. It brings together friends and family and develops our traditions and cultural identity. Food is a basic human need and right.

But what if we did not have enough food? Food insecurity can occur for any individuals or families when:

- a limited or uncertain amount of money for food is available;
- there is a reduced quantity or quality of meals;
- food intake is irregular;
- people cannot get enough food that is nutritious and safe; or
- they cannot get food in a way they feel good about.

Food insecurity can lead to hunger and poor health. Lack of adequate, healthy food increases the chance of health problems like colds, headaches and fatigue and decreases our ability to concentrate, learn and work. It is not only low-income families or those living on social assistance that are at risk of food insecurity. Many families today struggle with factors that can increase the risk of food insecurity, such as:

- Difficulty with mobility
- Disability
- High living costs (housing, rent, hydro, etc.)
- Job loss
- Lack of skills or education
- Lack of money or regular income
- Lack of transportation
- Loss of farms or land for farming/gardening
- Mental or physical illness
- Single parenthood
- Social Isolation

In Northwestern Ontario it is not uncommon for a family with two adults earning minimum wage or higher to be at risk of food insecurity. According to data gathered in the annual nutritious food basket surveys, since 1998 food costs in the Kenora-Rainy River Districts have increased over 25%. In that same period, minimum wage increased only 13% and welfare and social assistance rates only 5%. Compared with the rest of the province, food costs in the Northwest are higher and average incomes are lower. In addition, living costs such as housing, hydro, electricity and gasoline have increased, while average incomes have

either stayed the same or decreased. That means that less and less money is on hand for food and other basic needs.

We need to ensure food is available for all! Food Security is a state in which all people at all times have access to safe, nutritious, affordable and culturally acceptable food. What can we do to help make our neighbours food secure?

- Support the development of government and public policy to ensure a living wage and access to affordable housing and quality child care.
- Make healthy foods accessible to all through discussions with local leaders and support for provincial efforts such as living wage campaigns.
- Give your time and provide food or money at food banks, community gardens, or school meal and snack programs.
- Provide space – a kitchen for cooking, some land for a garden.
- Donate supplies – like utensils, appliances, soil and seeds.
- Be a driver – help others by taking them to their community garden or the grocery store.
- Get involved in your community – we all benefit when communities care!

People who do not have enough food to eat are single or married, young or old, working or unemployed, educated or not educated, and come from all walks of life. For more information on food security/insecurity contact the Northwestern Health Unit.