

Harvest Voices and the pyramid of choices



It takes a province, and an organization like Harvest Manitoba, to feed a province. With a task that big — to feed 80,000 people a month and counting — you must be efficient, organized and knowledgeable. You must know food and nutrition, and you must know the needs and life conditions of the people who need food support to get by.

Harvest Voices is a new survey we conducted, in which we asked Harvest recipients about their lives. The published report will contain plenty of charts and academic footnotes, but *Harvest Voices* is not about the food. It turns out that more than anything else, *Harvest Voices* is about people who need food and about what they need to be self-sufficient.

Here are a few of the lessons we learned from the 2021 *Harvest Voices* report:

- People want to work and support themselves. Earned independence is a life goal;
- People who have disabilities have a harder time finding work with a living wage;
- Kids can suffer from food insecurity and from the anxiety of parents who worry about it every day.

One of the other big takeaways is the amazingly positive story in the background of *Harvest Voices*, which is that your donations to Harvest — cash, tins for the grocery bin, or a car full of garden vegetables — are much more powerful and valuable than we ever knew.

A jar of peanut butter that goes from your hand into the Harvest grocery store bin can land on somebody's table and be the basis of 10 meals, two outings with the kids and a week of reduced stress for parents. And that's just the 'now' impact. Long-term, kids from households with reliable access to food do better in school and achieve greater health and happiness throughout their whole lives.

There's an old hockey saying: "Goaltending is the least important thing. Until you don't have it — then it's everything"

Well, food is the goaltender of the 'everything' that goes into growth, development, confidence, health, happiness and hope for all of us, rich, poor, young or old.

The pyramid of life's everythings

Imagine a pyramid. Inside are

medications, dental care, soap, winter coats, transit fare, rent, clothing, school supplies, insurance, treats for 'movie night'... plus all the other 'everythings' that take a bite out of the household budget and compete with reliable access to food.

When you have a Harvest Hamper, you worry less about food. You can make fewer impossible choices because you have more resources to address the everythings competing for your attention. So, a gift of food becomes peace of mind, feelings of good fortune and good will. And this is not a one-sided transaction.

Connections of community — the missing year

Harvest Voices respondents mentioned how going to the food bank, waiting in line and getting coffee before picking up their Harvest Hamper was a much-valued social connection. It produced a sense of community and belonging.

When COVID-19 took that away, they felt they could no longer talk to volunteers or other people while collecting their hampers.

They lost their community connection and a lot of the internal power we get from those relationships. For those who gave, the pandemic had a different impact.

As communal beings, we're motivated to contribute to feel that strength of community. Harvest was the connection. Pandemic giving heightened our community connection.

Look no further than the thousands of Manitobans donating almost 11 million pounds of food and funds last year. That's us walking the walk of being a community. We really are a community of Harvest Stars.

More to come

Harvest Voices was produced in the manner of a research paper. It contains a lot of charts and technical support references, but it's also a powerful, human document that contains recommendations and real-world initiatives to be undertaken by Harvest and others to help alleviate hunger in our province.

Next month's article will show you the action side of *Harvest Voices*.

For more information on Harvest Manitoba and its programs, visit www.harvestmanitoba.ca



Supplied image

Harvest's pyramid of choices illustrates the realities people must face.



**750,000 Meals a Month
Donate Today!**
We are a community of Harvest Stars!

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