

Action for Food Security Final Report, April 2002

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Project Background

The Action for Food Security project was born out of work undertaken by FarmFolk/CityFolk since 1995 to help form and consolidate local food security and food policy groups. These groups include a wide range of community organizations, businesses, farmers, and service providers and they work towards a locally based, self-reliant food system which will provide food for all members of the community, jobs, and security for both producers and consumers. In September 1999 these groups came together at a gathering in Sorrento, BC, to form the BC Food Systems Network.

Meanwhile, there was some concern in Health Canada that the support offered to pregnant women and young families through the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Canada Action Plan for Children (CAPC) programs was frequently of too short a duration to allow for long-term improvement in their nutritional status. Many program leaders are addressing this with projects which give young women food selection and preparation skills so that they can provide better food on a limited budget. However, the structure which places these families at risk is not affected by such programs and projects.

The Action for Food Security Project was therefore funded for two years, to link the provincially-funded Pregnancy Outreach Programs (POP) and CPNP /CAPC programs with community food policy /food security organizations with the expectation that this would result in community-based initiatives towards improved long-term food security for the program participants as well as the community as a whole. The project was based in a population health perspective and used the Determinants of Health /Hunger (see attached) as a framework.

Project Accomplishments

An explosion of food security initiatives: Since the inception of the Action for Food Security Project there has been an explosion of food security initiatives in the communities with which we have had contact. While we do not feel that we can take credit for the wonderful work done by program leaders and community members, we are nevertheless gratified that our project has been the catalyst for some genuine social change.

Wider scope: Our original plan was to select eight communities in which to implement the project. We quickly realized that given (a) the structure of the project (two part-time staff working province-wide) and (b) the short time-frame (just over two years) we would not be able to undertake substantial work “on the ground” in eight locations. Rather, the role of the project would be to act as a catalyst to program leaders and community groups to develop a deeper and more strategic understanding of the workings of the food system and the causes of food insecurity, and to support them in the development of community-based food security initiatives.

With this in mind, we were able to accept invitations to a total of 33 communities. Through workshops, public presentations, focussed discussions with program participants, and targeted conversations between program leaders and community food programs, we were able to support the development of a variety of initiatives, both within and outside of the CPNP /CAPC /POP programs. These initiatives focused on one or more of the “four directions of food security”: Access & Availability; Skills & Knowledge; Culture & Community; and Food Policy, and we tried to ensure that all four directions were covered in each community.

Increased Understanding of Food Policy: One of the most important accomplishments of the

project was to clarify and demystify the notion of food policy. This was consolidated at the Sorrento Gathering in 2001, where the idea was introduced that food policy operates at the personal as well as at the community, regional, or provincial level. It refers to the politics of food: the guidelines by which decisions are made that relate to the food system. As a result of this clarification, people have been able to think more systemically about food security.

Addressing the Issues of Participants: Access and availability are the first issues that rise up and hit people when faced with hunger in their communities. When we started our project, all of the POP and CPNP programs had some activities which addressed access to adequate food for their participants, in addition to the food vouchers which are generally used for milk and orange juice. One of our first acts was to help the programs share ideas about activities such as:

- teaching nutrition in the context of a weekly drop-in
- serving a regular (healthy, easy to prepare) lunch at a drop-in – and giving out the recipes
- regular cooking classes in conjunction with a lunch program (as often as 3-4 times a week)
- arranging to use vouchers at the local Farmers' Market
- gleaning from local orchards or farms
- running a canning /preserving kitchen, sometimes in conjunction with a gleaning program
- stocking a “cupboard” through case-lot sales and selling items in ones or twos to program participants at the case-lot price, or even subsidized further

Support for Gardening: If you are short of money, growing a garden can be a big help. However, gardening is difficult for women who are heavily pregnant or new mothers, particularly those who face the extra challenges of poverty, racism, ill-health, or poor education. Through the Action for Food Security Project, connections have been made with community gardens in several communities which, like Farmers' Markets, often supply extra produce to the programs; several programs have started a small garden on-site; others have garden plots in the community gardens which are worked by program graduates.

Increasing long-term food security requires that people are able to become less dependent on the dominant food system to meet their food needs. Community gardening, which offers people skills in food production as well as food during the gardening season, is an important step in this direction.

The Good Food Box: Another project which moves towards community food security is the Good Food Box, and through the life of the project a number of new Good Food Box projects were initiated in communities from Kelowna to Prince Rupert. The Good Food Box is essentially a produce buying club for people who might otherwise never purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. As such, it remains within the dominant food system, substituting volunteer labour for the work of the middlemen in the system. However, by purchasing from local farmers and emphasizing produce in season (the motto of the Victoria Good Food Box is “local where available, organic where affordable”), the Good Food Box begins to offer an expanded market and therefore expanded local food production, and to change the dependence on imported, expensive, out-of-season foods.

Sharing the Work: Interest in our project extended beyond British Columbia, and over the past two years we have had the opportunity to share our work with colleagues in the United States at the annual Community Food Security Coalition Conference; in Nova Scotia with the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council National Advisory Committee; in Toronto with a national Food Democracy conference which brought people concerned with food security from across Canada (and where we were gratified to note that BC is the gold standard for organizing around these issues); and at the National Rural Conference in P.E.I. We also responded to invitations to present at the Better Beginnings conference, the BC POP Association annual conference, and the Community Nutritionists Council annual conference, where we were able to spark increased interest and understanding of the food systems /population health approach to food security among those working in pregnancy outreach in BC.

New Tools: We also developed some tools for use in the programs, which are attached to this

report:

- (1) My Food Scrapbook
- (2) The Community Garden Game
- (3) Guidelines for a Good Food Box Program
- (4) Food System Quiz

Highlights of Activities for the Last Quarter:

Training: Late in 2001, we became aware of the training program for pregnancy outreach workers being offered by the Community Health Associates of BC on contract with Health Canada, in conjunction with the annual training for Aboriginal pregnancy outreach and health workers. Since the focus of the training was food security, we were invited to present this portion of the program, and training sessions were held in December in Richmond for the Lower Mainland, and then in Kamloops, Terrace, Prince George, Nanaimo, and Cranbrook in January - March. This was a golden opportunity to utilize the project's approach to food security awareness and strategizing in a more formal manner, to test some of the tools developed through the project, and to assess both the approach and the progress made over the past two years. We also used the travel opportunity to re-visit the programs in Terrace, Prince Rupert, Prince George, Nanaimo, and Victoria.

Meetings: On the food systems networking side of the project, we also attended the annual meeting of the Certified Organic Associations of BC and the annual meeting of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets and were successful in raising issues of community food security with the farmers there. Many of these farmers are now linked with community food security policy groups. We have also been working with groups in the South Okanagan to assist in the development of a community food security policy organization with activities in both Penticton and Kelowna.

Local Initiatives: Throughout the project, both Abra and I have maintained personal involvement in specific local food security initiatives as well as our networking and animation at the community, regional, and provincial levels. These include the Salmo Community Garden (Abra) and the Salmon Arm Good Food Box (Cathleen).

Learnings: What Worked

(1) The participatory evaluation process enabled the project to alter its focus in a timely manner in response to the feedback from project participants.

One of the interesting innovations in the Action for Food Security project was our use of a participatory evaluation process. We began by surveying participants in the pregnancy outreach programs to ascertain their concerns and issues in relation to food, and our intention was to use these women as a reference group to keep checking on our progress as the project proceeded. We soon realized, however, that this plan would not work, since the turnover of participants in the programs meant that the women we initially interviewed would have left the programs by the time our two-year project completed.

Our project therefore has focussed on the leadership of the pregnancy outreach programs as our primary reference group, while holding on to the agenda outlined by the participants in our initial interviews. In one case (the POWER program in Vernon), where the program has a Parent Advisory Group whose members have been associated with the program throughout the life of the Action for Food Security project, we have also used this Parent Advisory Group as a reference group.

In practice, this meant that the first priority of the project was to broaden the understanding of

food security among the staff and leadership of the CPNP/CAPC programs we were working with. This was (is) not a theoretical exercise, even though it was important, at times during the project, to explore some theory – such as the way in which the industrial food system works to impoverish people and diminish their capacity to feed themselves – in order to encourage alternative ideas and initiatives. Generally, our focus was practical: to find ways to link the program people with local food producers and with food security initiatives in the community. In some cases, the programs undertook new food security initiatives themselves, but it was not our aim to give more work to staff who generally are already working flat-out, often on a part-time basis.

It was also important to keep the issues raised by the program participants in mind at all times as we worked with the leaders. These issues were identified in the initial round of the Participatory Evaluation process as:

- barriers imposed by geography & distance to shopping within a community or distance to major shops in another community
- cost of non-food items which are purchased at the grocery store
- lack of information and resources, including information from other POPs
- lack of time and energy as well as money to place nutrition as top priority (convenience, cost may be more immediately important)
- need for cultural sensitivity in suggesting food-related activities

We were very interested to discover that POP participants expressed deep concerns about food quality and had cogent comments on the whole food system, not simply their own personal needs for adequate quantities of food. The preliminary evaluation report summarized their comments as follows:

What's in our food? People want to learn to read labels and to identify ingredients. Participants want genetically modified food to be labeled as such. They want more information and less packaging.

We want fresh food that's good for our families. There is a lack of access to affordably locally grown food. Participants want to buy food that is good for their families and understand that organic food is a part of this, but the price tag is often prohibitive, both for organics and for fresh vegetables in general.

Bring food closer to home. There are transportation needs that are not being met (i.e. participants want better bus services with stops at the grocery stores, closer grocery stores). Grocery deliveries would also help. Local agriculture should be subsidized to produce for local consumption. Subsidies (which are often hidden) should be shifted away from large farms.

Teach people about food. Educate communities on the value of (organic) foods and improve the access to it. Learn how to compost. Maintain programs like community kitchens once they have started. Cooking clubs help people eat better, as do learning how to plant a garden, to can, or to bake bread. A breastfeeding friendly environment is critical.

Social assistance doesn't cover good food. Welfare money is not enough to feed a family according to Health Canada's standards (or anyone's standards). Bigger subsidies are required for pregnant mothers. Families need lower prices on their food bills.

Stop throwing food away. Find ways to use the excess: eg. Milk which is too close to due date to be sold by supermarket. Become less reliant on stores for food by contacting farmers (i.e. pay a farmer a retainer for fresh produce in the summer). There is a need to re-value of food in our society.

Share food and combine resources. Food co-ops and buying clubs help people to eat better. Freezers and dehydrators are two examples of way to maximize large shared purchases of food. Make community spaces for food (i.e. root cellar). Emphasize the social nature of food.

Think locally and globally. Canada should work to be more self-reliant in food, focus more on people and not corporations

(2) We were able to provide a wide range of information in response to the issues raised by the participants.

Our initial assumption – and that of the program leaders we worked with – was that the overwhelming issue for participants in the pregnancy outreach programs was the cost of food: that with their limited financial resources they could not acquire enough food for themselves and their families. While this turned out to be the top priority, it was followed as a close second by the issue of food quality, as indicated in the list above. This was expressed in a number of ways, including the need for foods which are culturally appropriate (including immigrant women from different cultures and First Nations women) and food which is seen to be safe and healthy (in particular, free from genetic engineering).

One result was that in addition to addressing strategies for acquiring food more cheaply, we were also challenged to address cultural food issues, and to provide information to the programs on genetic engineering of food. We were asked to make a number of presentations on the subject of genetic engineering, and distributed a basic factsheet “Ten Myths About Genetic Engineering” as well as Abra’s booklet, “A Canadian Consumer’s Guide to ingredients which may have been genetically engineered”. These issues were also addressed directly at the Sorrento Gathering in September, 2001, where Trudy Jack, an elder from Merritt, presented a workshop on Preserving Native Foods, and Brewster Kneen presented a workshop on genetic engineering.

(3) We established methodologies for raising food security awareness and analysis, and for ongoing contacts between the CPNP /CAPC /POP programs and community food organizations and projects.

The BC Food Systems Network was established at a gathering in Sorrento in September 1999. The purpose of this gathering was to develop a common position on food policy which could be presented to governments at the municipal and provincial level, in particular in relation to the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries hearings in the fall of that year. In 2000 the Action for Food Security Project sponsored another Sorrento Gathering, this time with the purpose of bringing together POP participants, food security and policy activists, and First Nations representatives to explore their issues in relation to food security, and to present the participatory evaluation methodology. While the conference was, on the whole, successful, it was clear that the gaps between the participants were quite wide.

The 2001 Sorrento Gathering therefore focused on narrowing those gaps by providing a context for collective exploration of food policy at the personal as well as the more ‘political’ level. We also ensured that everyone had an opportunity for ‘hands-on’ learning (bread-making) as well as participation in more theoretical discussions of issues such as community-level fundraising, organization of Good Food Box and Community Kitchen projects, and the Native Foods and Genetic Engineering discussions mentioned above. This combination of the personal, practical, and theoretical was wildly successful, and we will certainly use it as a model for future work.

What we could do differently:

(1) Allow a longer time-frame for the project to expand and consolidate learnings. While issues may be common among the programs and communities with whom we have been working, they play out differently in each location; in addition, it takes a long time to develop the level of trust which will permit the most helpful support.

(2) Arrange to have training for pregnancy outreach workers and aboriginal health workers (of the sort that was done by CHABC), at the beginning of the project, to highlight issues and begin to

build networks of trust among and between these programs.

(3) Recognize from the outset that there would be requests for project support well beyond the focus areas which would be difficult if not impossible to refuse.

Evaluation:

The Evaluation being completed by Kathleen Gibson of GBH Consulting (in consultation with Theresa Healy of Northern FIRE who initiated the Participatory Evaluation process for the project) will be forwarded under separate cover.

This Report and the Evaluation will be circulated to all the groups we have been working with. In addition, the Food Scrapbook, Paper Soup, and the Community Garden Game will be circulated as easy-to-use tools for the development of a food security consciousness in participants in the pregnancy outreach programs.

This project is not finite. Whether or not there is adequate support, the demands and needs for support will not end with the funding.

Sustainability:

This project acted as a catalyst to spur the development of strategic thinking about food security among the CPNP /CAPC /POP programs. The leadership of the programs have been connected into the BC Food Systems Network, which addresses food security from a policy perspective. The key activity of this network is the annual Sorrento Gathering, and if the achievements of this project are not to be lost, it is imperative that ways be found to ensure that the Sorrento Gathering continues with strong participation from the CPNP /CAPC /POP constituency.

Recommendation #1: Sustain the annual Sorrento Gathering

It will also be of critical importance to enable the leadership in the CPNP /CAPC /POP programs to continue their learning in this area. Given that many if not a majority of the programs operate with part-time staff, it can be extremely challenging to send people to training and networking events, as program elements have to be sacrificed if staff are absent. A carefully planned program of exchange visits and mentoring among the programs would be a substantial support to the networking and information-giving which can be achieved through the BC Food Systems Network listserv and website. Such electronic means of communication, we have found, work well only in combination with opportunities for face-to-face sharing.

Recommendation #2: Establish exchange visits and mentoring among the programs, and pay for staff time to do so.

We have discovered that in some way this is a never-ending project; once people are aware of the resources and expertise we can offer, they will continue to call upon us (and are doing so) even though we are no longer funded to provide these resources.

Recommendation #3: Provide funding to enable response to continuing demands for information resources and support.

In-Kind Support:

In-kind support received by the project included accommodation and meals for both of us on our site visits, space and refreshments for meetings, photocopying and mailing, phone calls, and volunteer hours from program leaders, participants, and ourselves as project staff. We estimate the value would be approximately \$5,000 per month of the 26-month project, i.e. \$130,000.

Organizational Strength:

The BC Food Systems Network (of which the two project sponsors, FarmFolk/CityFolk Society and the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group of BC are both members) has been considerably strengthened by this project. The most important effect has been to bring pregnancy outreach participants and leaders, and First Nations activists, into the Network. This has been of inestimable value in enabling us as a group to work more effectively and consistently for a sustainable food system in BC.

Support from Health Canada:

There are three ways in which our relationship with Health Canada was important to the success of the project:

(1) Interest and Flexibility: Our Program Consultant was interested in our project and kept informed of what we were doing so that when we faced problems, for example with the participatory evaluation process, she was able to give helpful advice and also to help us – for example, amending the budget to include some extraordinary expenses.

(2) Reliability: After an initial glitch, the funding flowed to us in advance in a timely manner. This is critically important for a community-based organization which does not have the funds to advance for work such as this.

(3) Confidentiality: We were able to discuss and problems which arose in the course of the project with our Program Consultant in complete confidentiality.

The only suggestion we would make for improvements would be to enable a longer funding term. As mentioned before, we feel that this project would have been even more effective – and considerably more sustainable – if it were a five-year rather than a two-year time-frame.

We would add that given the lack of interest in food security on the part of the provincial government in British Columbia at this time, support from Health Canada is more important than ever.

Local Action for Food Security

Context – Any discussion of food security in British Columbia in 2002 must begin by noting the increased hardships being endured as a result of provincial government cuts to social services, government services, and income support. All of the programs with which we have been working have shared stories of clients who are further degraded, marginalised, and debilitated by their inability to get adequate food and shelter for their families or to get either employment or training, as a direct result of these government policies. At the same time, volunteer resources are being stretched ever thinner, and emergency services such as food banks are facing much increased demand, with former donors now showing up as clients.

How Linking Works In Practice – An example is the development of the Good Food Box project in Victoria. Two members of the local food security policy coalition, CR-FAIR (Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable) attended a Local Food and Business Fair sponsored by the Council of Canadians, where they met two young women from the Status of Women Action Group who were interested in starting a Good Food Box program. Having attended the Good Food Box workshop at the Sorrento Gathering 2001, one of the CR-FAIR members was able to provide information on how to set up a program and, with the community nutritionist (also a CR-FAIR member) arrange mentoring from the manager of the Good Food Box in Vancouver. The other CR-FAIR member made the connections to the Direct Farm Marketing Association farmers to arrange supply of food for the box. Life Cycles was contacted and offered to help with space for cooling and packing the produce. The result was that within two months, a successful Good Food Box program (30 boxes the first month, 50 the second month) was established at the Fernwood Community Centre with participation from the First Nations Friendship House and Best Babies Victoria.

SNAPSHOTS: Please note that the following accounts are merely snapshots of some of the highlights of different programs and communities around BC. Many of the programs have similar activities and we did not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of all of them.

Northern Interior – A powerful tool for the development of food security was created through a collaboration between what were at the time the four northern Health Regions in the “Healthy Eating Active Living – HEAL” project. Initiated by Prince George nutritionist Joanne Houghton, this is a Diabetes Prevention project which will, over the course of three years, support and encourage community-based food security and physical activity initiatives throughout the northern Interior of BC. (Joanne has the distinction of being the only community nutritionist whose job description specifically includes community food security work.)

Prince George – The Food First organization was started several years ago, and has sponsored a number of educational events in the community on issues relating to food and food security. It brings together people involved in a wide variety of food security initiatives. Community gardens have doubled in the past two years and there is great interest in the organic gardening workshops which are presented each season. The farmers’ market has secured a downtown location and is prospering. Community kitchens include a dynamic youth cook training program. At the University, there is student interest in food security as an academic topic as well as practical initiatives including public presentations on various topics, an organic composting demonstration, a bulk buying club and a campus-based Good Food Box. Food First also sponsors events such as Seedy Saturday and is currently organizing a community-based Good Food Box project.

Healthiest Babies has been through a management crisis with a total staff change in the past year, but continues to run The Good Food Store stocked by the program in case lots, where moms can buy dry and canned foods at low cost. They also have an emergency food shelf with rice, pasta, skim milk powder, and run a monthly community kitchen which also does canning and preserving.

On World Food Day last year they invited pre/postnatal POP clients to a Stone Soup Day. Women brought in a food to add to the soup. Clients painted rocks and also told a story about hunger, which was very emotional. The Stone Soup Story was also read by one of the clients. Two local newspapers came in to take photos and printed a good story even though they never printed the pictures. A large container of soup and fruit was given to each of the women to take home.

Dawson Creek /Fort St. John – Dawson Creek Food Share sponsors a Good Food Box program, soup kitchen, and a food redistribution project. There is a Community Organic Garden at the Northern Lights College, and the Advantage Workers Coop (low-income people) is leasing an established organic greenhouse from its owner: they grow food in the greenhouse and a new outdoor garden on the same property, and sell to the established customers. The biggest need in the community at present is a common kitchen facility.

The POP program is located in the Native Centre and there are other programs for pregnant teens in the community.

The community nutritionist has been working to make stronger links with food security projects in other communities in the Peace-Liard region, particularly Fort St. John, where there is a Good Food Box program operating out of the Salvation Army food bank, and a lot of interest in other food security projects.

Chetwynd – The worsening economic situation has impelled some key participants in food security work in Chetwynd to leave the community. There have been attempts to establish a Breastfeeding Support Group and money was raised to buy a breast pump, but this initiative is stalled at the moment. In the meantime, however, a community kitchen has been established and it is linked to Meals on Wheels. There is also Food Safe and dietary training for participants. There continues to be interest in developing a coordinated food security program from both the

food bank (which is located in the Tansi Friendship Centre) and from the Women's Centre but they are currently overwhelmed with crisis work.

Quesnel - Williams Lake - 100 Mile House – The Quesnel POP program has a drop-in serving food every two weeks. They have nursing bras available at discount prices, and access to a free breast pump. They are connected to interested individuals from church, farm, and social service sectors in the Quesnel Food Network who meet to share information and to identify overlaps and gaps in the local food system. In Williams Lake there is a community kitchen program in which moms can continue to participate after their time with the POP program; they also have an emergency foodshelf. In both communities there is access to gardens but little participation from the POP moms. In 100 Mile House, the Family Connection has nutritional education and a community garden but the community kitchen is no longer operating.

Smithers – At the present moment, the POP in Smithers has lost its sponsor at the Dze L K' Ant Friendship Centre and no other sponsor has been confirmed. When it was operating, the Smithers program ran a community kitchen /cooking program once a month and a weekly drop-in that served food. There are a variety of community gardens in the area, including a major project undertaken at a disused rehabilitation centre on the edge of town by a group of young people (Northern Root Garden Project) which is expanding to include a commercial /community kitchen program. Last summer they built a greenhouse and they are planning to build another larger one if they can get the funding.

There have also been changes at the Office of the Wet'suet'en, where the program officer who was committed to food security initiatives has been replaced, leaving a number of projects, including collaboration with Northern Root Garden, on hold.

The Bulkley Valley Food Group includes people involved with the farmers' market, genetic engineering action, an organic box delivery project, gardening, and several local food businesses including a bakery. Their annual seed swap event is very popular.

Moricetown and region – the Moricetown POP is located on Reserve and is focused on healthy families (as opposed to a more pointed focus on women and children) – it tries to involve elders and integrate cultural issues into the program, and one of the regular drop-in lunches includes elders. Several women have taken doula (birth support) training. There is strong breastfeeding support, and vouchers may continue well into post-partum for breastfeeding moms (although formula-feeding moms on social assistance may get them too). Plans for a community garden on the reserve were set back last summer by the tragic accidental death of the young woman who had been hired to coordinate it. The Bridget Forsythe Memorial Garden did eventually get established and the food is very welcome, especially among the elders.

The POP program has a weekly community kitchen which is very successful, there are also a number of community kitchen initiatives in the community and nearby communities, including a bi-weekly men's kitchen and there are community gardens in Hazelton, though the POP moms do not participate. Starting Smart in Hazelton has weekly drop-in that serves food. In Dease Lake there is also a bi-weekly drop in that serves food, and participants help each other with food needs, particularly sharing of wild meats and fish. Good quality fresh produce is hard to get, and there is a story about the "Dease Lake roadkill" – when a produce truck headed to Alaska slipped off the icy road and lost its load, which was quickly scavenged by the locals.

Terrace – There is an active Anti-Poverty group in Terrace which runs a successful community garden, and a very strong farmers' market. Community kitchens have been difficult to establish, with many prospective clients afraid to take the risk. The POP program has developed a fine teaching tool in the form of 'kits' for each activity area: for example, the breastfeeding kit includes model breasts of various shapes and sizes as well as a breast pump and informational pamphlets. There is also a Building Blocks program and an active Women's Centre. As elsewhere, housing is a major issue in Terrace.

Prince Rupert – Given the high rainfall and coastal soil (or lack thereof) the food mainstay of Prince Rupert is fish; but not everyone has access to fish, it depends on membership in a First

Nation, or family. Cost of basic staples is a big issue. The food issue is being addressed from a perspective of women's health, and the POP which is located in the Friendship House is taking a lead developing a food coalition, whose first project will be a Good Food Box. They are networking with Terrace and Smithers to source fresh food for the box project. The Friendship House has also received funds which will be used to build a greenhouse in the adjacent vacant lot to provide produce for the POP and other food programs.

Kitamaat – There is a strong emphasis on breastfeeding support. A breast pump is available, and their weekly \$20 voucher is continued postpartum (though only once a month) as long as a woman is breastfeeding; in addition there is a \$30 gift certificate for women who are still breastfeeding at 4 months. If the woman is very impoverished, this sum can be increased. The village has a community kitchen program which runs once a month but is limited to those on social assistance (thereby excluding, for example, elders living on a pension). Problems of vandalism, lack of good soil, and financing have prevented the development of a community garden and the POP leaders are trying to support back-yard gardens.

Whistler-Pemberton – The weekly drop-in serves food and there is a monthly community kitchen which uses the new, clean band kitchen. There is also a farmers' market in Whistler but it has not yet linked with the POP.

Kamloops – The Kamloops POP works with women to 4 months post-partum. They have strong links and support from the Mental Health providers, particularly in dealing with post-partum depression. They have a regular drop-in lunch program catered by the Community Kitchen leader with simple, nutritious food. The Community Kitchen program is separately funded and very active. There is Good Food Box program run by the Salvation Army (some participants are hesitant to buy the Good Food Box because of the association with the food bank). The nutritionist who works with the POP is a core member of the Kamloops Food Policy Council.

The Kamloops Food Policy Council has moved ahead substantially in the past two years. After a considerable effort to develop a Food Policy for Kamloops and the Thompson Region, the Council finally persuaded the Thompson Health Region Board to adopt following motion:

That the THR Board of Governors endorses the four elements a, b, c, and d of the vision of the Food and Nutrition Policy as follows:

- a) Safe and nutritious food is available within the region for all residents
- b) Access to the safe and nutritious food is not limited by economic status, location, or other factors beyond a resident's control
- c) There is a local and regional agriculture and food production system which supplies wholesome food to the region's residents on a sustainable basis
- d) All residents have the information and skills to achieve nutritional well-being.

The KFPC worked with the Kamloops Social Planning Council to develop an implementation strategy for this vision and embed it in the Social Plan. They are hoping to have this adopted by Kamloops City Council soon, and then will ask Council to announce a Kamloops Food Charter proclaiming the principles of community food security.

In addition to the range of projects represented by the KFPC (breastfeeding support and advocacy, community gardens, the Farmers' Market, the Food Bank etc.) the Council succeeded last year in establishing the Garden Gate Training Centre. This is a 2-acre garden and production greenhouse on land owned by the Health Region, aimed at training people with mental and developmental challenges in basic food production skills. Last summer the excess food was sold at the Kamloops Farmers' Market, which is one of the largest and best established in the province.

The Kamloops Farmers' Market works with the Food Bank by selling laminated 'dollars' to customers which are donated to the Food Bank and given to clients, who can redeem them at any stall in the Market. They are considering broadening this to make it a general gift certificate so that nobody can tell the customer got the 'dollar' from the Food Bank.

Merritt – A similar motion to the above has been adopted by the Merritt City Council, and a member of Council has been instructed to work with the Nicola Valley Food Forum to develop an implementation plan. This is largely the result of the work of the POP coordinator Jenn Cody, who has been the key person initiating the Food Forum. The Food Forum sponsors occasional public education events and is trying to establish a regular networking schedule. The POP has a cooking program which provides food for participants 3 to 4 times a week. The POP also has a community garden plot and is linked with the Food Forum.

Shulus Gardens, a community farm and youth employment project of the Lower Nicola Indian Band, did not receive funding this year for salaries, so they will simply run a community garden – profiting from a great crop of garlic which was sown last fall, and a wide variety of herbs which the project planted and sold both fresh and dried for the past several years.

Last summer a Farmers' Market was established in Merritt, again largely through Jenn's leadership. While it was quite small (5 vendors) it provided training and experience and they are expecting to expand significantly this year.

North Okanagan – The POWER program in Vernon covers Vernon, Lumby and Armstrong. In addition to their vouchers, they have a weekly drop-in where food is served, and a cooking program once a month where the clients cook. There is a Community Kitchen program in the community which moms are encouraged to join. The Health Region, through the initiative of the community nutritionist, has acquired dehydrators which will be shared among POWER participants so as to deal with the problem of storage of fresh food.

The POWER program along with Healthiest Babies Possible in Salmon Arm helped to initiate the North Okanagan Food Coalition which also includes the Salvation Army, the Boys and Girls Clubs, Community Kitchens, Seniors' Centre, and a variety of other community and social service groups and which decided on a Good Food Box as their first project. They built on the experience of the HBP in Salmon Arm which had a small box program, purchasing all the food from a local fruit stand. Outreach to other programs and the community at large resulted in rapid growth so that in Vernon the program has grown to almost 400 boxes total for Vernon, Lumby, Cherryville and Enderby, while the Salmon Arm program sells about 70 boxes a month and Armstrong sells about 40. A 'graduate' of POWER (the Vernon POP) receives an honorarium to coordinate the program in Vernon and a graduate of HBP in Salmon Arm has been the coordinator of the Salmon Arm program. (Both of these young women came to the CHABC training in Kamloops to present the Good Food Box program as a food security initiative.) The group emphasize they are not a charity and describe their program as being "for anyone who has difficulty stretching their food dollars to include fresh fruit and vegetables".

The Good Food Box group is planning to develop a recipe book, using the recipes which have been collected and developed to go in the boxes, and making it available to communities around the province to personalize and use the cookbook for funding. The cookbook will focus on inexpensive, nutritious dishes using seasonal ingredients, and will include a nutritional analysis of each dish.

It is important to note that there is support from the Regional Health Board for food security work which has enabled the community nutritionist to work with food access programs and move towards a food security perspective through the development of the Food Coalition.

South Okanagan – The activity in the North Okanagan spurred an initiative in the South Okanagan, organized by the community nutritionist in Penticton. There is a strong movement towards a food coalition in both Kelowna and Penticton which includes the CPNP /POP program leaders along with other social service providers, farmers, community gardens (Penticton) and some food-related businesses, including an excellent organic box delivery program recently started by a young couple in Kelowna.

The Penticton POP has started cooking classes for participants, while the POP on the reserve in Penticton has a community kitchen once a week, where participants plan the meals and do the shopping and cooking to eat together and take home. They have a garden but only about a third of the participants are able to take part. In Kelowna there is an established community kitchen at the POP where participants prepare 3-4 meals to take home. These kitchens run once a month or

more.

Among the major concerns of project participants in the South Okanagan is the potential loss of more farmland out of the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Lower Mainland:

Surrey-Delta-White Rock – The Food For Kidz Coalition has recently undertaken a community-based needs assessment /research project on the extent and causes of child hunger in the area with financial help from United Way, in a participatory research mode, with enthusiastic involvement from a wide variety of community organizations and social service providers.

The Surrey POP program collaborates with 6 other programs in a Harvest Box, which is coordinated with a box program at Kwantlen College to give them the numbers for efficient ordering. It is a \$5 box, and they have a grant from VanCity to pay the coordinator; they also get support from the Delta fire fighters. They are hoping to expand the program and have just completed a survey to look at bringing the Harvest Box program to White Rock.

The Surrey POP has a regular weekly lunch club (drop-in), and a special lunch for Punjabi speaking moms every other week, which has morphed into Punjabi Prenatal Education Group. (25-30% of moms in the Surrey program are Punjabi speaking.) The Punjabi group is held at a Sikh temple, and the temple serves lunch, They look for Punjabi speaking guests, or the facilitator translates.

A complete survey of Community Nutrition and Food Security Programs in the South Fraser Health Region over the past 20 years was undertaken by the Public Health Nutrition Program in 2001. It details a wealth of projects, from the Senior Chef cookbook to the development of Breastfeeding Policy.

Langley - Aldergrove – The Langley POP also does the Harvest Box but its size is limited by the resources available for management (i.e. 24 boxes). The box uses students from the school in which the POP program is located to pack the boxes on their recess (and take a piece of fruit as a reward). It's a great system and the students are most enthusiastic. They also have a drop-in that serves food twice a week and a weekly community kitchen program where participants pay \$2 and take home two meals. There is strong breastfeeding support and they give an Infant t-shirt to moms who breastfeed to 6 months. (This is done at the Surrey program as well.)

Avoiding FAS is an issue for most of the POPs, but in Langley it was also identified as an issue for the moms themselves, and one of the moms who is "living with FAS" made a presentation to the rest of the group on the issue (pretty powerful stuff).

Ridge Meadows - Mission – After several years of effort, and a very successful demonstration day at the local Mall in the fall of 2000, the Ridge Meadows Hunger Coalition is currently 'on hold'. The community nutritionist is continuing to provide support and a special meal for teen moms at the local high school.

In Mission the POP runs a community kitchen every other week which now includes participants from the Aboriginal outreach as well as the POP, and a \$20 food box which may include staples (eg. pasta). Mission also has a Farmers' Market which operates in the downtown from May to September.

Attempts to develop a broader coalition in Mission identified the need for more general education about hunger; they did an "empty bowl" project, where local potters and school children made and donated bowls. Soup was made by a local chef, and participants paid \$10 for a bowl and a bowl-ful of soup, also buns and a piece of fruit. This was designed as a fundraiser for the food bank. The Mission Community Food Coalition has also sponsored community food forums to raise public awareness.

Abbotsford – the POP has a food exchange cupboard. The program funds the initial stock and then participants are supposed to exchange foods they don't want (which they have received from friends or the food bank) for items they prefer. In practice, participants rarely exchange but rather

just take what they need. They have no formal community kitchen but once a month the participants plan and prepare the food for the drop-in.

Burnaby - New Westminster – the POP post-partum moms take turns cooking for the weekly drop-in, and are becoming more involved in set-up and clean-up; after the baby is 6 months old, moms can stay involved by volunteering some time. The Burnaby Family Life has a kitchen program but it is not directly connected to the POPs. They have access to a garden but space is limited so few moms can participate. They also receive financial support from the proceeds of the Pro Organics golf tournament.

Vancouver/Richmond – The Vancouver Food Policy Organization has lost its staff person and its records are lodged with FarmFolk/CityFolk, which continues to work on food policy development.

During the past two years VFPO received substantial support from the Food Bank and undertook two major projects: the Community Food Security Indicators Project and the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Project. The VFPO has been part of the Food Providers Coalition, which links groups dealing with hunger in the inner city and is in the process of establishing a “farmers’ market” in the Downtown East Side. The VFPO has also sponsored a number of public education events.

The food security projects in Vancouver are free-standing, with established Community Kitchens which are funded independently and a number of gardening, food mapping, and Good Food Box or Bag projects. The Good Food Box has just published an excellent manual for volunteers which it has made available around the province. Very few POP participants garden, and the POP is investigating the “Linking Land and Future Farmers” project which connects people who want to garden with people who have land they are not using.

Sheway, a pregnancy outreach program in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, is dedicated to working with women who are dealing with drug and alcohol issues. The focus is more on providing respectful and effective service than any hope of achieving economic independence and food security for a considerable portion of the clients. They are working with Indian Homemakers to develop a mothers’ centre where the moms can socialize, do laundry, use a computer etc. with childcare on site. They also serve a daily hot lunch.

Healthiest Babies Possible, serving Vancouver and Richmond, has the challenge of working in a culturally diverse urban community, reflected by the program staff who speak 10 different languages. There is, for example, a Somali Support Worker who assists women coming from a nomadic desert lifestyle, where the main foods of camel milk and goat meat come from the herd animals. Vegetables and fruits were rarely consumed as they were simply not available. At the Richmond Lunch Club and the Vancouver Multicultural Parent Drop In, the women try local fresh fruits and vegetables for the first time. A Punjabi-speaking worker does a community kitchen in Richmond and they also have a plot in the Community Garden there.

There are also food security initiatives at the Friendship Centre, including a chef training program and a young parents program two days a week where they cook together, including sometimes cooking meals for the elders.

The Building Blocks project focuses on higher-needs families as abuse prevention; it attracts Vietnamese, Native, and Spanish-speaking participants at the Grandview-Woodlands site.

The Good Food Bag was piloted by Healthiest Babies Possible in Vancouver, and continues for program participants with 50-60 bags per month at \$5 each. The Bag is subsidized by a generous monthly gift from Pro Organics.

From June to October, participants who live close to the East Van Farmers’ Market and are willing to get up early, are offered a market tour and coupons to be redeemed for fresh fruits, vegetables, and eggs. The tour provides an opportunity to talk about organic farming, as both organic and non-organic farmers are part of the market, though farmers complain that they don’t have enough time to talk as much as they would like because the market is so busy. Teens from the Young Moms Community Kitchen have reserved a table at the market and sold fruit pies baked at the kitchen. They enjoyed the experience and the extra income. While the community

kitchen program would like to buy from the Farmers' Market, they have not found someone to buy the food on Saturday nor a place to store it until mid-week when it can be used.

Healthiest Babies Possible has sponsored two outreach workers to take the lactation consultant course at Douglas College. Vancouver/Richmond Health Board also has a Newborn Hotline which provides breastfeeding support.

HBP has just lost a half-time position through government cut-backs.

Vancouver Island:

Courtney/Comox – Like some other pregnancy outreach programs around the province, this program benefits greatly from having a supportive umbrella organization – shared resources, facilities, staff as well as the strong connections to relevant and related services. In the case of the Comox Valley Family Services, they are even in the same building, making access for moms easier. The group has a 'meal in a bag' – a concept which was developed independently in Esquimalt – where they put together the makings of a complete family meal along with a recipe. In Courtenay they prepare the meal at the drop in, and send the participants home with the dry goods and a voucher to purchase the fresh produce needed.

The Courtenay POP and CAPC are also each taking a plot in the local community garden to work with the clients in developing gardening skills and interest. With some help from the project, the Comox Valley group developed a clear language, youth oriented basic skills cookbook for their clients. They also continue to develop a food skills entrepreneur program with the addition of an approved kitchen facility.

Campbell River also has drop-in meals and nutrition counselling, and a recently-established farmers' market.

Powell River – The food security group enjoys the full support of the third largest employer in town, Powell River Association for Community Living. The local soup kitchen is run by the Seventh Day Adventists; with donated materials, designs and volunteer labour, they recently completed a lovely room and new kitchen for their needs. (They have all ages of clients, including kids who come over from the nearby elementary school.) With assistance from cadets from nearby military operations they have cleared a site for a community garden behind the kitchen. With support from the project, two separate food safe courses have been held which have been very successful in supporting volunteers of the community kitchen program.

Nanaimo – The Nanaimo FoodShare has succeeded, after two years of fundraising, in purchasing a building from the city for use as a FoodShare Centre. All the FoodShare activities are now based in the Centre, including ongoing collaboration among all the emergency feeding programs in the city, the summer lunch program for out-of-school kids, community gardens (which are next door) and facilities for cooking and processing.

There is a large Community Garden program in Nanaimo which includes a garden open to anyone who wants to work on it, as well as individual allotment plots. The Recycling Exchange program is very active, and there is a Good Food Box project and a Gleaning program.

There is a good connection with the POP program at Tillicum Haus Friendship Centre, where a garden has been started for the partners of the POP moms to grow food for their "My Parents Are Cooking" program. Like many other programs, Tillicum Haus sees families who are very marginalized. They focus on supporting healthy families and parenting skills, learning how to avoid abuse: a medicine wheel approach which includes mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects. For participants who have not 'succeeded' in the system they work to redefine success. Patience is required: real personal change and community development takes a long time. For example, they had pilot funding to start a cooking program but the fact is that it could not become self-starting in only three years. Similarly, they discovered that the Friendship Centre cook was distrustful of the vegetables grown in the garden and insisted on washing them over and over since they obviously came from the dirt, unlike the shrink-wrapped vegetables from the store.

Victoria – Over the past year Victoria Best Babies has created a drop-in and breastfeeding

friendly environment in a heritage house, acquired by their sponsoring agency, Fernwood Community Centre.

They have two weekly lunch groups, one at the Fernwood Centre and the other a pilot outreach at Blanshard Community Centre (BCC), in collaboration with community partners. The Blanshard area is nearby and has many low income residents. The POP program works with the BCC to provide on site services for the moms as well as referrals. BCC also has a storefront where they sell goods at cost and accept the POP vouchers (though because of the limited fruit and vegetable selection, few participants use this option). They also provide info sessions about food through the store.

VBB offers Shop Smart tours quarterly, and participants receive a food voucher after the tour.

Their Community Kitchen program has two sessions monthly. They have also successfully connected with the Lifecycles Fruit Tree program and offer a Baby Food Community Kitchen quarterly, or in conjunction with fruit tree harvest time. They also have The Parent Resource Group, which meets weekly and, like their Baby Food Kitchen and other programs, includes community members as well as POP participants and graduates. Gardening in the backyard is a priority project and is well underway, along with connections to community resources including Lifecycles and the Composting centre.

Like other pregnancy outreach programs, VBB tries to support the personal growth of their participants, for example, noticing that one of the moms liked photography, the program coordinator paid for film so that the mom could take photographs of the other participants' babies and develop her skills.

Esquimalt – This program is an example of the kind of stress being experienced across the province at this time.

The Esquimalt program has been a model for a well integrated and comprehensive food security based program. However, they have been in limbo for approximately four months as to their funding and that of the sponsoring agency, the Esquimalt Neighbourhood House. Their program is so successful because all the services are available under one roof and they are able to meet many of their clients' needs both within their mandate as well as those that aren't by referring them to another program offered at the House. However, that joint approach is currently their 'achilles heel' as all the programs which enable the administration and maintenance of the house are in jeopardy of losing some if not all of their funding. Even if only some of the programs lose their funding, the others are unlikely to be able to run the House on their own.

They have seen an increase in the anxiety and needs experienced by their clients due to increased school classroom sizes and withdrawal of other support services. The circumstances for these frontline workers is inhumane as their workload is increasing at a time when they do not know if they can provide their current level of services (including knowing if they themselves will have a job!) in a week, a month or next year.

In this context, one of the more important roles of the project has been to offer moral support and encouragement to program staff.

One highlight is a group of Moms who started their own quit smoking program with the support of the POP. They do a community kitchen once per month preparing 3 meals at no charge. All the programming includes a meal, and they also offer free Food Safe Certification. Food vouchers are given to participants up to six months postpartum, and there is a monthly Shop Smart Tour that includes a \$10 gift certificate for groceries. They also have an emergency food cupboard with dry and canned goods, day-old bread; at harvest time gleaners deliver potatoes for distribution, also fruit, and the program offers canning workshops at harvest time.

The program has had some success in involving current and past participants in food security projects, including a program cookbook, of nutritious, inexpensive and easy to prepare meals, and a "how to save money" booklet, that includes managing on a very small food budget; a coupon exchange; and participation in the Food Forum. Some volunteer to cook or shop for the POP lunches. One has gone on to employment in a food system organization (LifeCycles).

Kootenays /Boundary:

Christina Lake –

Cranbrook –

Invermere – The high school has a chef training program which prepares the meals for the school cafeteria. This means that they have to sell their products to their classmates, and is leading to changes in the food attitudes of the whole school as the classes learn to prepare innovative and unfamiliar, nutritious dishes.

Nelson – The Nelson POP is currently in the process of shifting to West Kootenay Family and Childcare Services and the staff are excited about working with a sponsoring agency who shares their values and priorities.

Action for Food Security helped the Nelson POP to develop a Good Food Box project, using all local, organic produce from local farmers. Moms would rather support local and organic as food quality is a high priority. The box has been enthusiastically received – “the good food box is a good plan, man” pretty much summed up the response. Everyone was impressed with both the volume and quality of the produce and the fact that it was local.

There is a lot of activity on food and gardening initiated by Earth Matters, a youth project which has also undertaken a heritage seeds project which collected and documented seeds grown in the region, some of them many decades old. They are involved in canning and baby food making workshops with the POPs clients but have also extended to residents of the youth housing. Other groups are coming together to address emergency food services in the Nelson area and a “community food bank” and AFS is working with them to urge a broader vision of various activities which develop skills, and provide a safe place in addition to being an access to emergency food which does not strip a person’s dignity.

An interesting food security initiative in the region has been the Christopher Spicer Centre, which collected a library of resources and engaged in policy advocacy (including a gathering with the Ministers of Agriculture and Health to enable local people to express their concerns last year). The Centre has recently become ‘virtual’ but its members are continuing to work on food system initiatives to support local food production and processing.

There is considerable community support in Nelson for activities outside of the dominant system, such as barter and harvesting wild foods. This is also evident within the pregnancy outreach program, where there is a high level of support and sharing among the participants, including caring for one another’s children so the mom can have some ‘child-free’ time, swapping baby clothes, bartering skills and material goods, and sharing equipment. This attitude of community building through sharing is of critical importance in building a local, self-reliant food system which can offer genuine food security to every member of the community.