



EDMONTON'S  
FOODBANK

2018  
BEYOND FOOD  
REVISITED

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## INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, Edmonton's Food Bank spoke to 402 clients to find out how they were doing. We learned some interesting and concerning information. Forty-two percent of respondents had attended university, college or trade school; more than half of the people we surveyed had an annual household income of less than \$25,000; 47% ran out of money by the second week of the month and 70% were unconnected to any other support service other than Edmonton's Food Bank.

A lot has happened in three years. The economy tumbled and more people lost their jobs. In lock-step with this, the number of people requiring hampers from the Food Bank increased by 50.6% from 13,869 individuals in July 2015 to 20,892 in July 2018. It was time to talk again with the people we serve.

One of the messages from clients in 2015 was that it would help to have a service that offered employment readiness, access to safety tickets, English and Math upgrading, personal counselling, budgeting advice and information about affordable housing. With the help of several community partners, we opened *Beyond Food* in November 2017 to serve anyone in the city that needed this help. Please see the Beyond Food leaflet at the back of this document for more information.

During June and July 2018, with the help of four social work students from Norquest College and volunteers and staff from Edmonton's Food Bank, we spoke to 505 hamper recipients. Our interviews took place at the Main Food Bank and at 18 food depots across the city. The questions were similar to the ones asked three years ago. With the help of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the results were collated and analyzed.

Our 2018 survey results are captured mostly in graphic form for ease. As you review the survey results, please keep in mind that every number represents a person; every person has a story; and, every story is about resilience and hard work to survive and care for themselves and their family members.

We hope that this report provides valuable information to the Food Bank, other community partners, the public and decision-makers. It is our plan to share this information broadly and share the stories of people needing Edmonton's Food Bank. More importantly, it is an opportunity to walk shoulder-to-shoulder with Food Bank recipients and create change.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Bencz, CM  
Executive Director  
Edmonton's Food Bank

## INCREASING NUMBERS

Edmonton's Food Bank was founded, and continues to operate, as a short-term solution providing food services for individuals and families in need. Sadly, food insecurity continues to rise in our community; however, Edmonton's Food Bank has been weathering the increase since September 2014 thanks to the help of many dedicated supporters and volunteers.

Our clients come from all walks of life, such as seniors on fixed incomes, working families, individuals on disability, new Canadians, students, the homeless, and children under 18, who represent approximately 40% of the people we are helping. These are our family members, our friends, and our next-door neighbours.

## ABOUT THE GRAPH

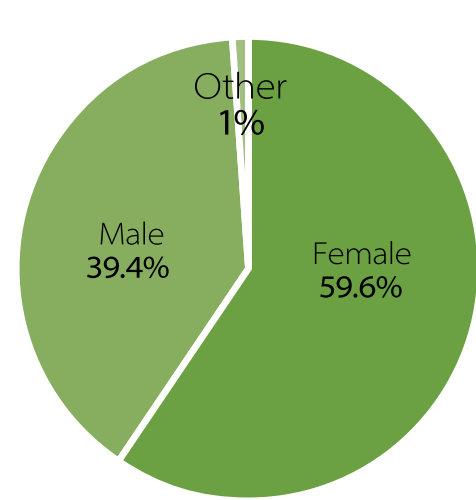
The graph below represents a per-month, 4-year comparison of the number of people in need accessing our services. **These numbers are representative of our hamper programs only** and do not include any data from our meal and snack programs. In 2017, 64,080 unique individuals received hampers. Again, this does not include people served by other programs.



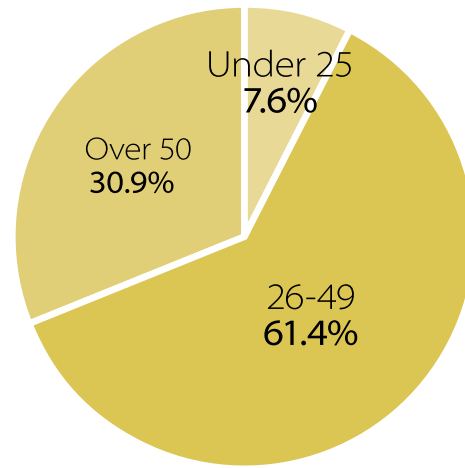
# WHO WE TALKED TO

## Overview

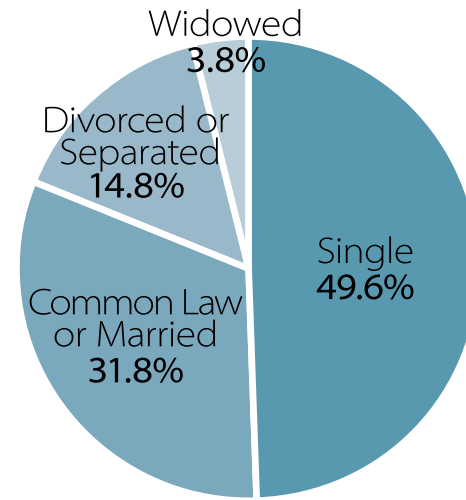
Six out of ten respondents were female. Half of the respondents were single and one-third married or common law. Half of the respondents have four people in their household and one-quarter have five or more people living with them.



GENDER



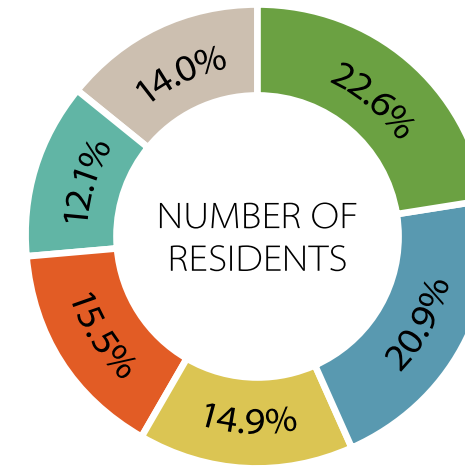
AGE



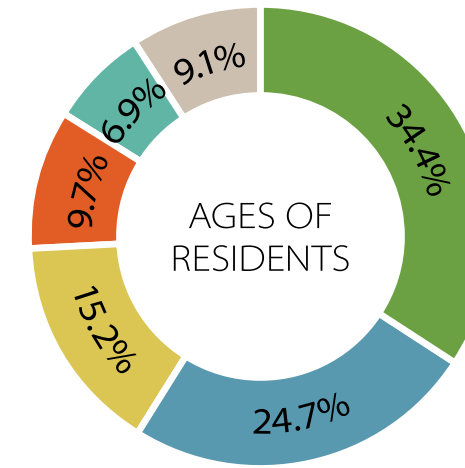
MARITAL STATUS

## An Older Group

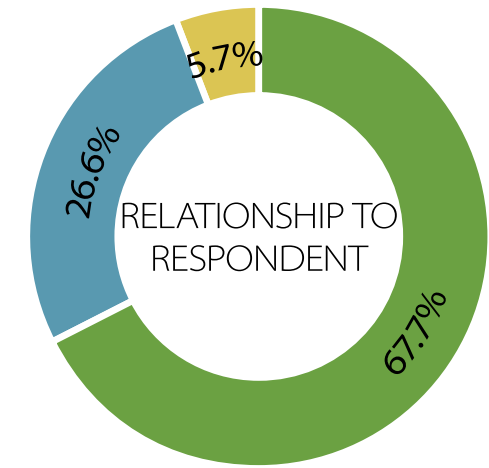
In 2015, 23% of respondents were 50 years of age or older. Now in 2018, respondents over 50 years of age represented 30.9% of all participants (age chart on page 5). The increase is consistent with recent trends at Edmonton's Food Bank.



- One Resident
- Two Residents
- Three Residents
- Four Residents
- Five Residents
- Over Six Residents



- Under 10 Years of Age
- 11-20 Years Old
- 21-30 Years Old
- 31-40 Years Old
- 41-50 Years Old
- Over 50 Years Old



- Child
- Family
- Non-Relative

## STORY FROM A SOCIAL WORK STUDENT

*"During my time conducting the surveys, I was better able to understand some of the struggles that clients of the Food Bank are dealing with on a much deeper level... There was this one time that I tried to complete a survey with this older lady but could not because I became so emotional and overwhelmed... (She) was once a teacher but now lives in a home that was rundown, that had no functioning bathroom and she could not pay for heat, so she stays cold in her own home during winters... I wanted to grab and take her home with me where she would never have to take another sponge bath because she didn't have running water or ever feel the cold of winter again... These surveys have allowed us students to experience the sheer rawness of the struggles that Albertans face every day."*

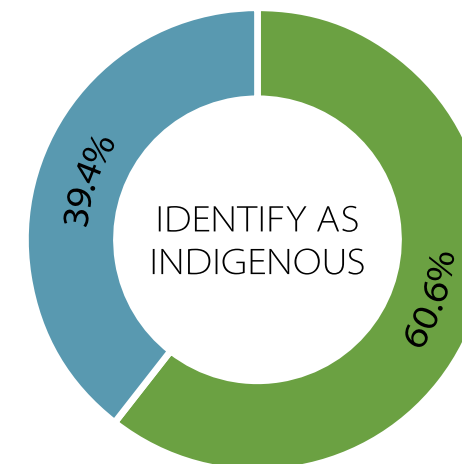
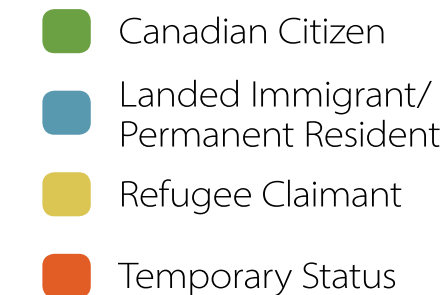
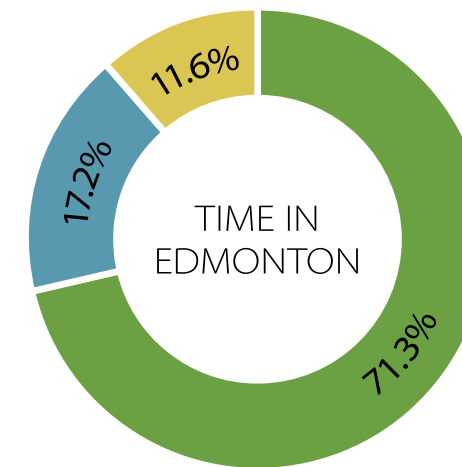
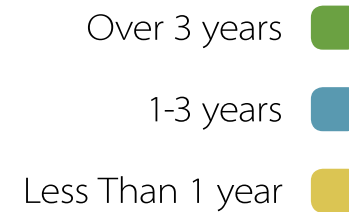
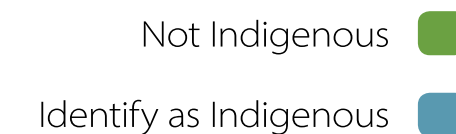
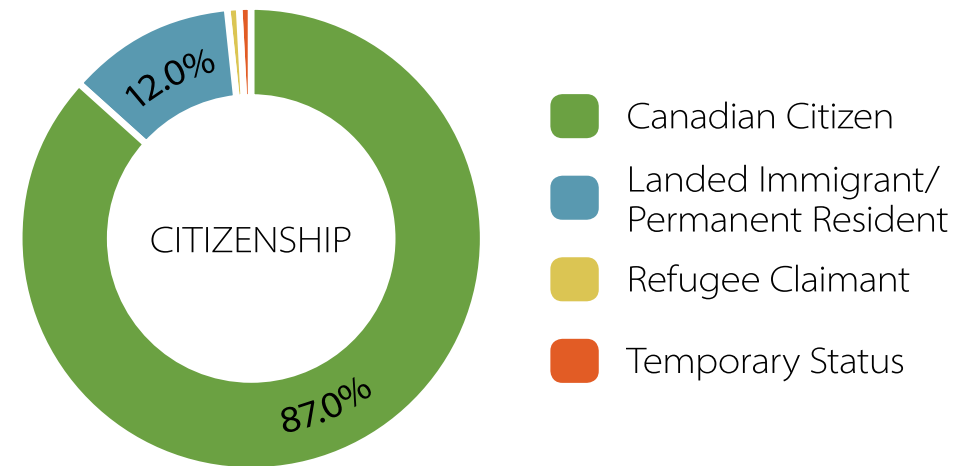
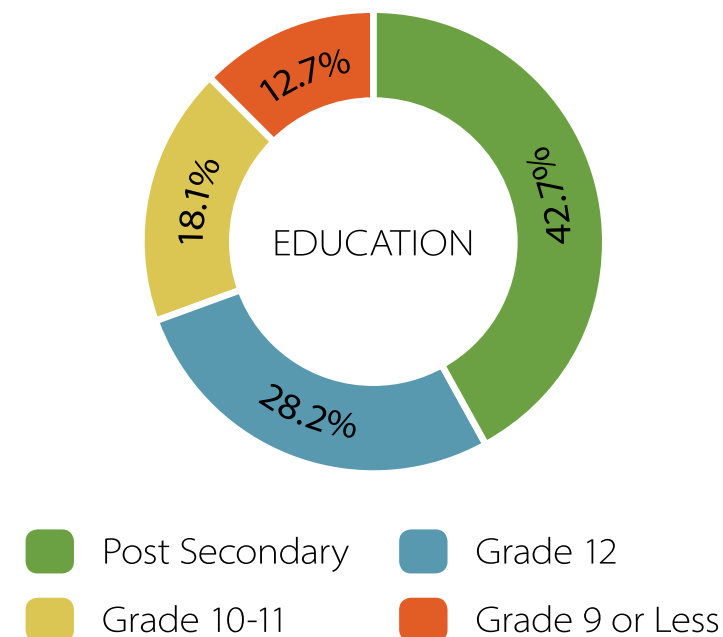


## WHO WE TALKED TO

**Most Call Edmonton Their Home:**  
 Almost 90% of the people we spoke with are Canadian citizens (similar to the results in 2015). More than 70% have lived in Edmonton more than three years.

**Many Identify as Indigenous:**  
 39.4% percent of respondents self-identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, Inuit or Non-Status). This is consistent with 2015 when 34.3% said they were Indigenous. This over-representation is another sign of the social and economic challenges facing Indigenous people in this city as only 5% of the total population in Edmonton identifies as Indigenous.

**Food Bank Clients Are Well Educated:**  
 Similar to 2015, almost 43% of respondents had either attended or graduated from trade school, college or university. Another 30% had completed Grade 12.



## CLIENT QUOTES

*"I borrowed money and had to re-borrow to pay the cheque-cashing service."*

- Senior Citizen

*"I started working now, so it will be better."*

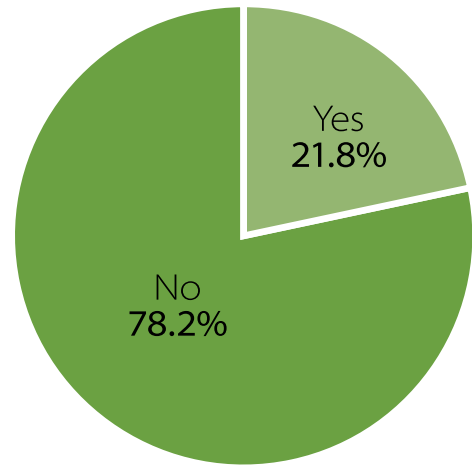
- Single Male, 50

*"Sometimes my friends cook extra food and bring it to me or leave it in my mailbox. My pastor is really my counsellor."*

- Senior Widow

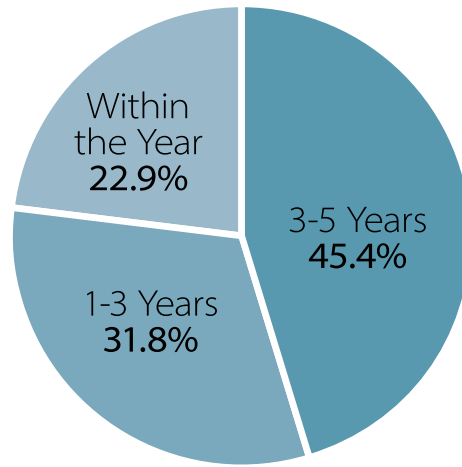
# LIVING ON LOW INCOME

A majority of Food Bank clients are unemployed. 78% of respondents were unemployed during the three months prior to the survey. In 2015, 71% of respondents were without work.



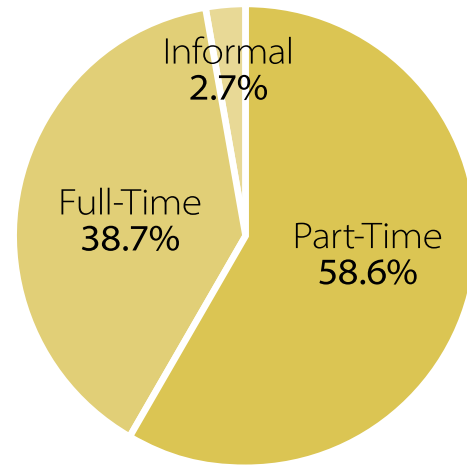
EMPLOYED IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS

Long-term unemployment is an underlying issue. Almost one-half (45%) of those who say they were unemployed have been out of work for more than three years. Almost one quarter (23%) have not worked in the past year and an additional one-third (32%) have not worked for 1-3 years.



LENGTH OF UNEMPLOYMENT

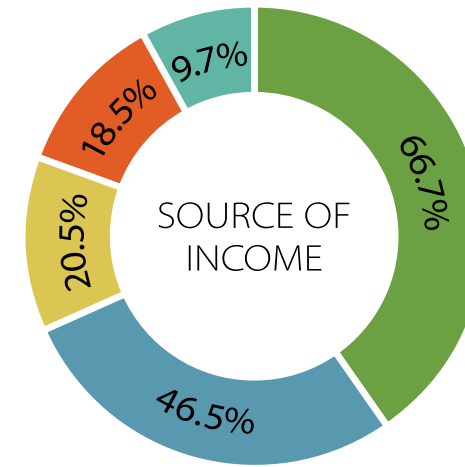
Of the people who are working, most are part-time. Almost 60% of respondents that are working are employed on either a part-time, casual or seasonal basis.



FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME

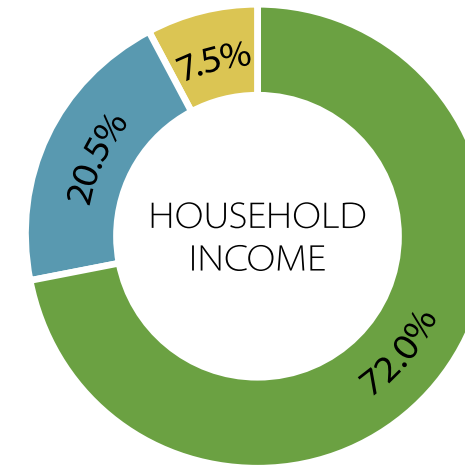
A significant increase in clients relying on government income support. 46.5% of the people we spoke to are receiving Alberta Works income support and 18.5% are receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). This is an increase from 2015 when only 36% of respondents were on Alberta Works and 13% received AISH.

\*Respondents selected "all that applied"



- Other Government Support
- Alberta Works
- Employment
- AISH
- Other

An increasing number of people have less than \$25K annually to live on. 72% reported that their household income in 2017 was less than \$25,000. This is a significant increase over the 2015 results when 53% were in this category.



- Less than 25K
- 25K - 40K
- More than 40K

## STORY FROM AN INTERVIEW VOLUNTEER

*"The person I interviewed was an electrical engineer in Egypt, very articulate and excellent decision-making skills. He is in his mid-50s and came to Canada three years ago. He cannot get a job; he even offered to volunteer with a company, but no luck. His health is deteriorating due to increased stress."*

## CLIENT QUOTES

*"I'm behind on my rent and power. I'm on the verge of being evicted. I don't always pay my full rent so that I have enough to buy food. I've lost everything in the past year."*

- New to Edmonton

*"I sometimes go without food for a few weeks until I can go to the Food Bank. The neighbours help, bring me leftovers and I pawn. I run out of money the first week after paying bills and buying groceries."*

- Middle-Aged Male on AISH

*"With the help of my family and the Food Bank, I am able to eat and feed my newborn baby. Food Bank gave me a lot for my baby."*

- Young Mother with Infant Son

## HOW MONEY IS SPENT

### More than Half Spent on Housing

Apartment rent paid by respondents is just about the same as three years ago; people are paying about the same even with a higher vacancy rate in the city. If 72% of survey respondents are earning less than \$25,000, then, on average, they are spending 55% of their income on rent and utilities.

### Cost of Housing

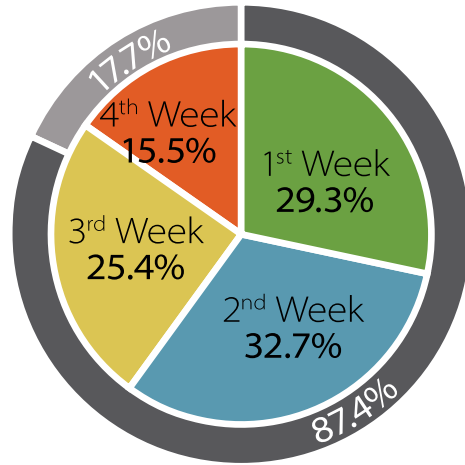
A staggering 97.5% of respondents said they rented; the average cost around \$929 monthly. Only 3.1% of the respondents make payments on a mortgage, averaging around \$775 monthly.

### Cost of Living

On an average each month, respondents said they are paying \$422 on food and personal care (toiletries), \$219 on utilities such as power, gas, water and phone bills, \$181.14 on transportation costs and \$108.82 on medications.

People are running out of cash sooner.

62% run out of money by the second week (compared to 47% in 2015). 87% have no money by the end of the third week (compared to 70% in 2015).



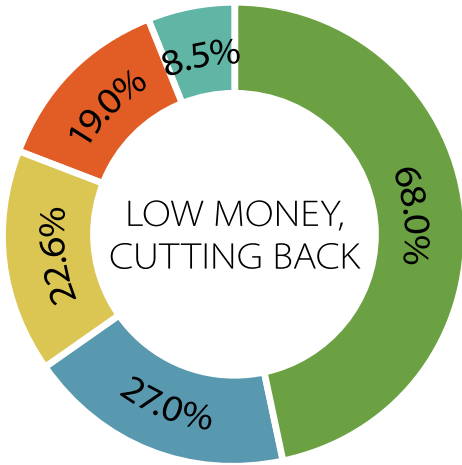
DOES YOUR INCOME LAST THROUGH A FULL MONTH?

No Yes

A roof over one's head is priority number 1.

The main expenditures that people reduce when running short of money are food (68%); utility bills (27%), clothing (22.6%) and recreation (19%). 8.5% report that they don't pay the full rent during a month to manage their budgets.

\*Respondents selected "all that applied"

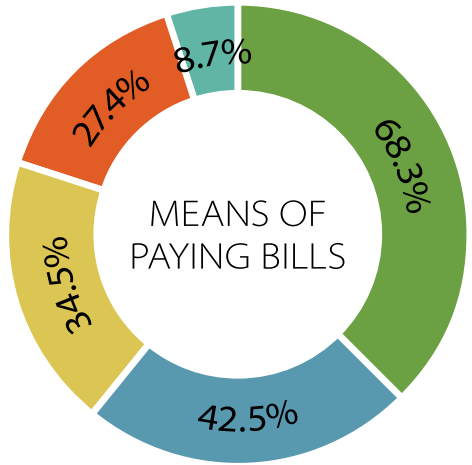


- Food
- Utility Bills
- Clothing
- Recreation
- Rent

Selling, borrowing and pawning.

Compared to 2015, more people are selling their property (34.5% vs. 27%), using credit cards (29% vs. 20%), or borrowing from friends and family (68% vs. 60%). A similar percent is using pay-day loans (27% vs. 25%).

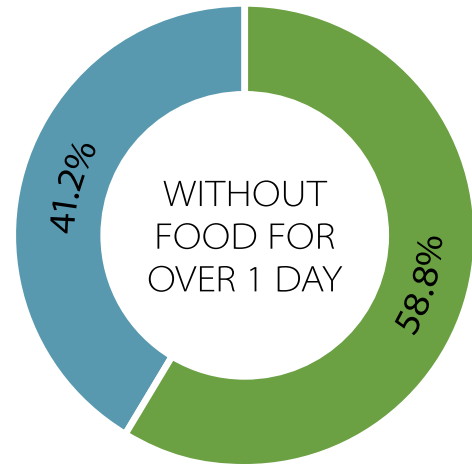
\*Respondents selected "all that applied"



- Borrow
- Credit Cards
- Sell Possessions
- Pay-Day Loans
- Cash in RRSP

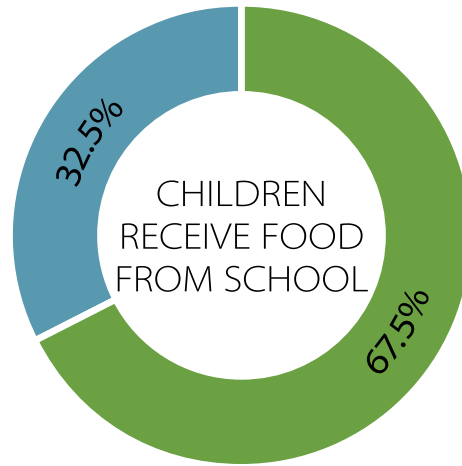
# WHEN FOOD RUNS LOW

Forty percent of survey respondents did not have food for one day or more during the past year.



- No
- Yes

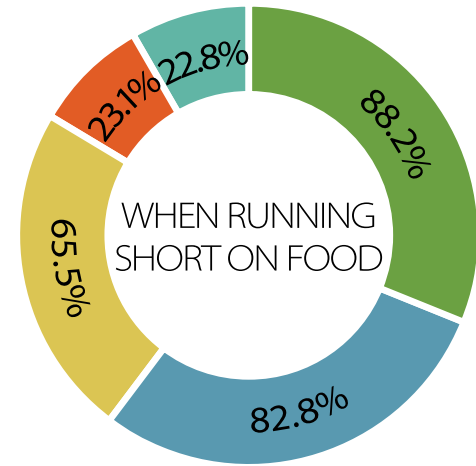
Sixty-seven percent reported that their children do not receive snacks or meals at school.



- No
- Yes

When running short of food over 80% of respondents borrow money or get food from friends and family.

\*Respondents selected "all that applied"



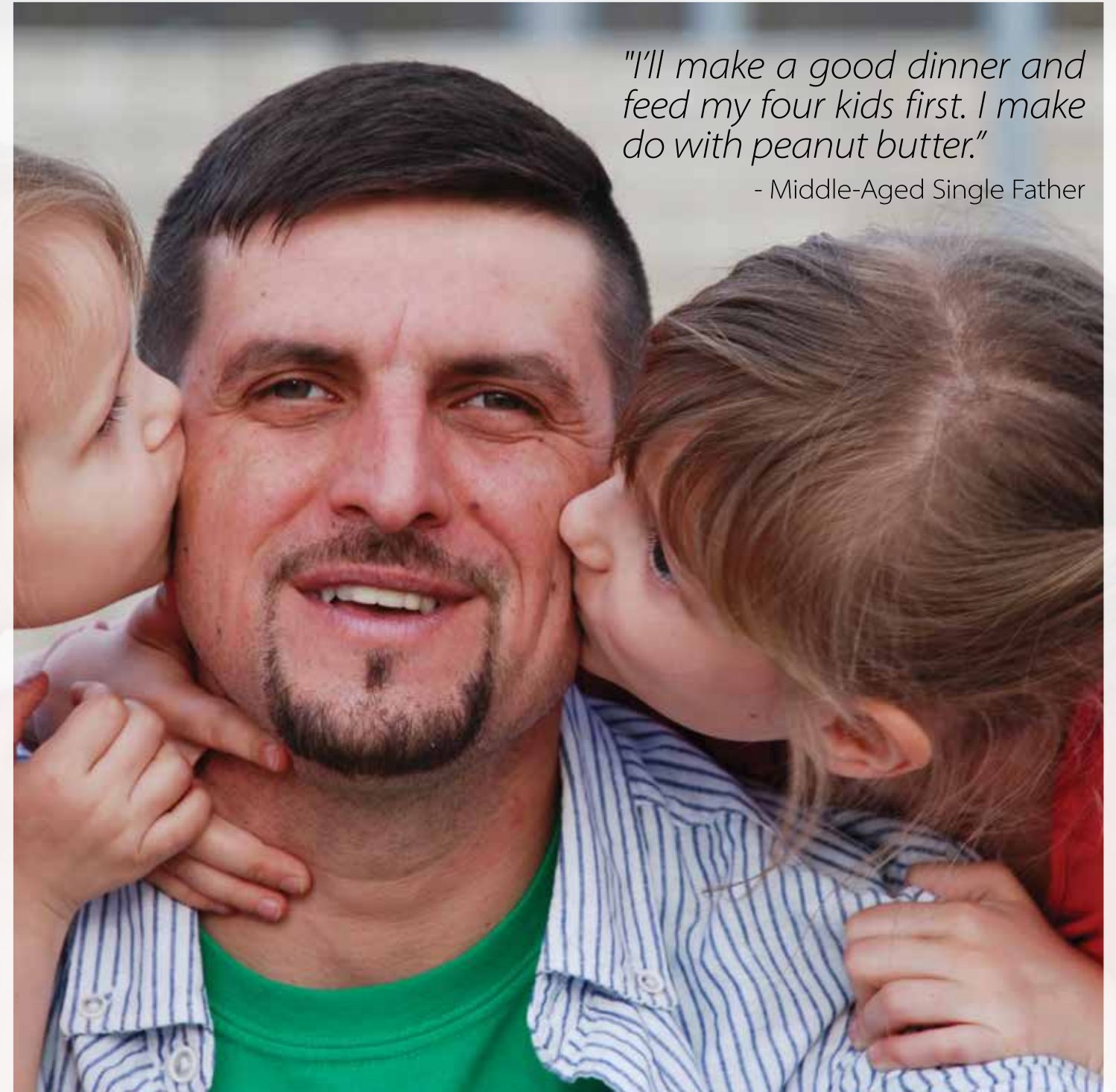
- Food from Food Bank
- Borrow Money or Food
- Buy Less Expensive Food
- Skipped Meal for Children
- Sell/Pawn Possessions

*"The stuff I sell when I'm running short is usually for food."*

- Single Mom

*"I give up food for my children to have something to eat when the kids are staying with me."*

- Mom, 34



*"I'll make a good dinner and feed my four kids first. I make do with peanut butter."*

- Middle-Aged Single Father



## HEALTH AND STRESS

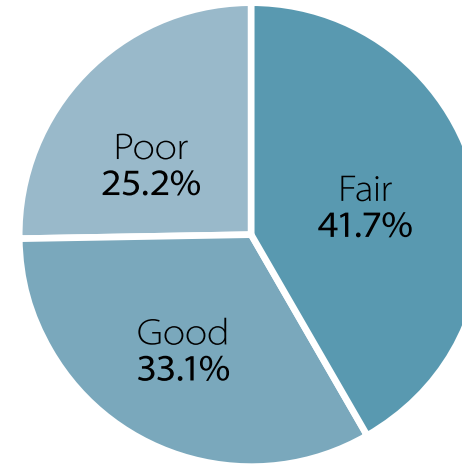
Health Remains a Concern (similar to 2015)

- 67% rated their physical health as poor or fair.
- 38% thought their family members' health was poor or fair (compared to 20% in 2015).
- 62% thought their family members' health was good.

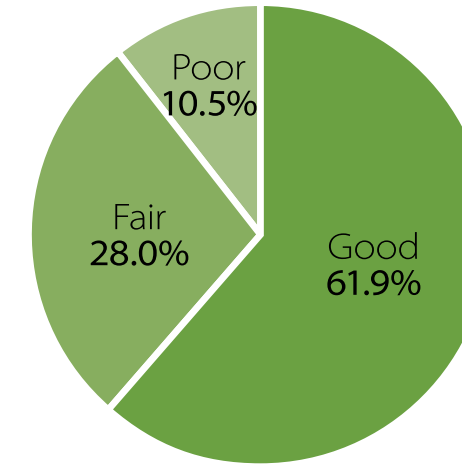
People Feel Less Healthy and More Stressed

- Compared to last year: 35% felt less healthy; 44% felt their health was the same; and almost 21% felt healthier.
- 54% reported their stress levels were higher than last year; 27% the same; and 18% said their stress was lower.

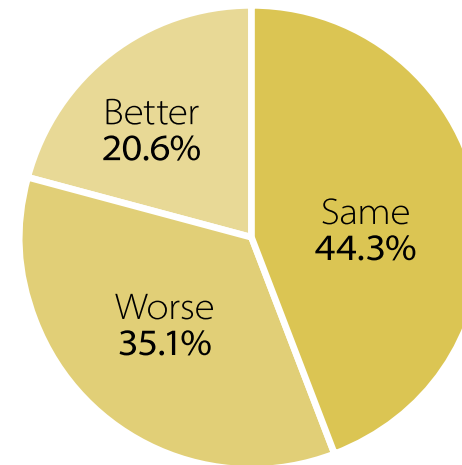
RESPONDENTS'  
PHYSICAL HEALTH



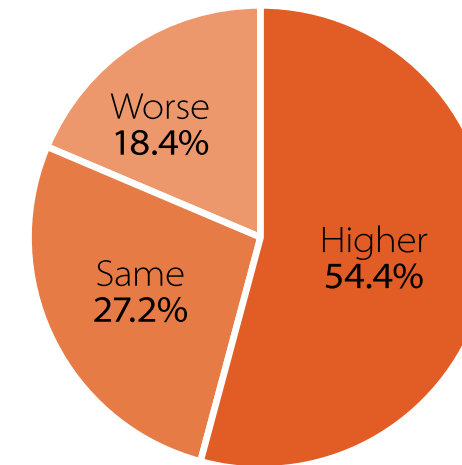
FAMILY  
PHYSICAL HEALTH



PHYSICAL HEALTH  
COMPARED TO THIS  
TIME LAST YEAR



STRESS LEVEL  
COMPARED TO THIS  
TIME LAST YEAR



## CLIENT QUOTES

*"I skip my meals so my son can have lunch. He's 34, is working and has cancer."*

- Senior Living with Two Adult Sons

*"I sleep at the park under a tree. The Food Bank helps me a lot."*

- Male, 60

*"Half my days I only drink coffee because I make sure there is food for the kids and my son-in-law."*

- Female Client

## WHAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**Consistent Need for the Food Bank**  
74% said they got food from the Food Bank two or more times in the last three months.

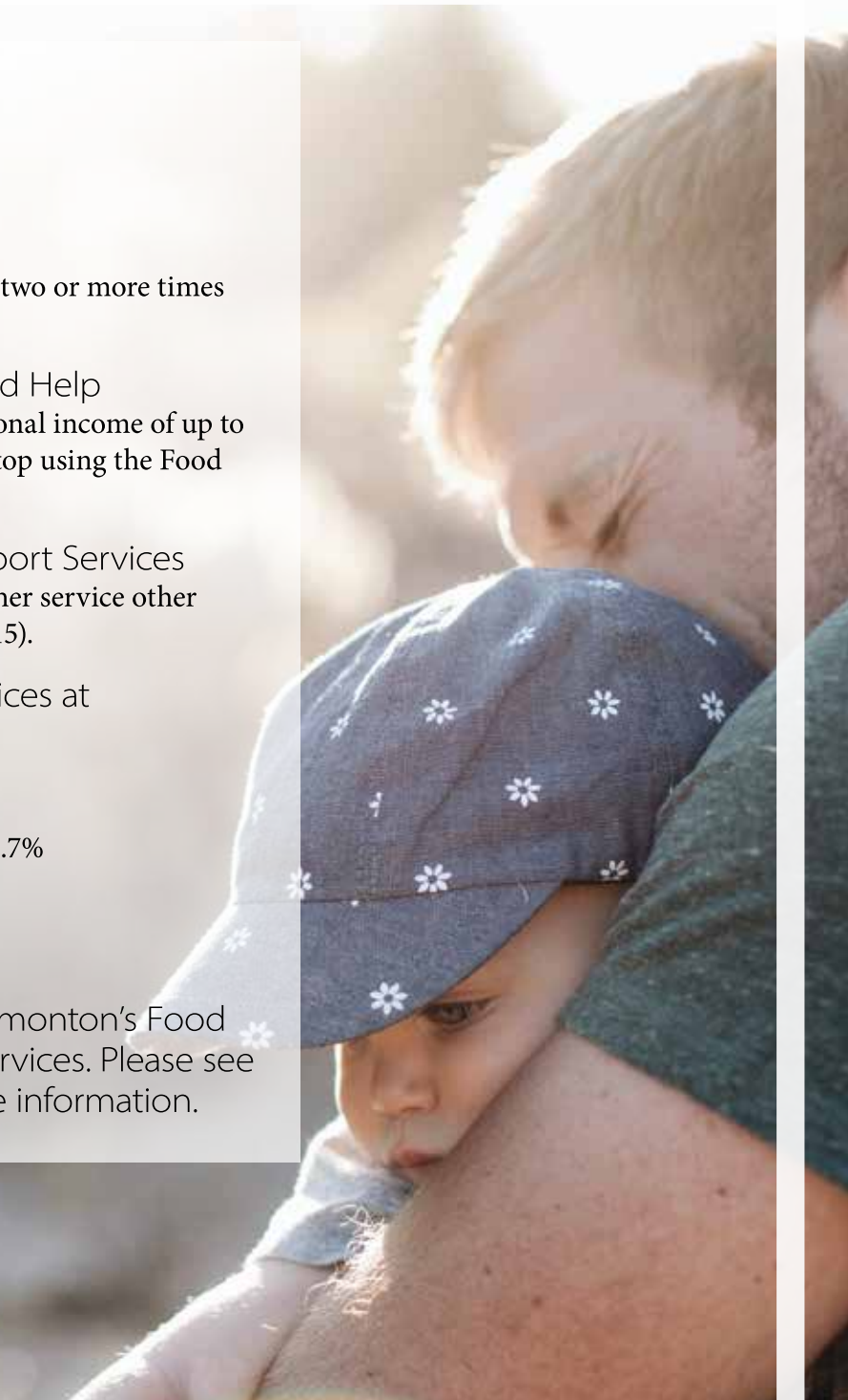
**A Modest Increase to Income Would Help**  
58% of respondents said that with an additional income of up to \$500 per household per month they could stop using the Food Bank (compared to 43% in 2015).

**People Are Not Connected to Support Services**  
74.8% said they are not connected to any other service other than Edmonton's Food Bank (vs. 70% in 2015).

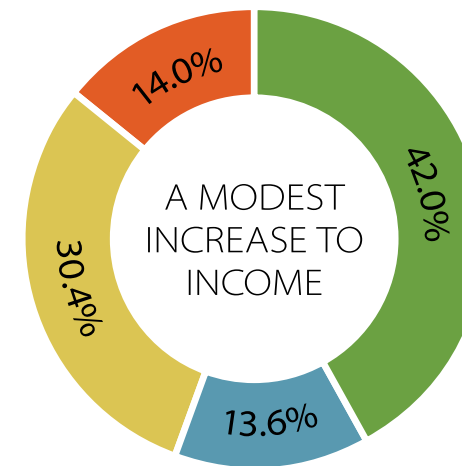
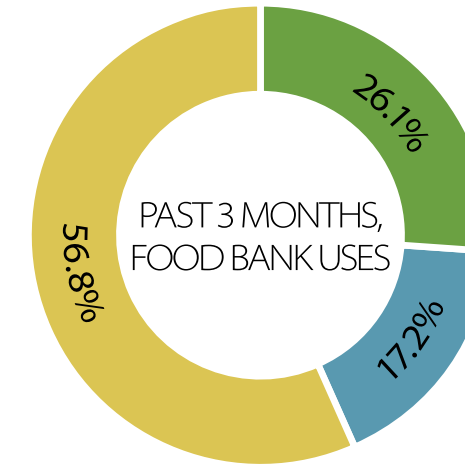
**Considerable Interest in Other Services at Edmonton's Food Bank**

- Help Getting a Safety Ticket: 41.2%
- Job Search: 36%
- Information about Affordable Housing: 25.7%
- Budget Help: 19.5%
- English Upgrading: 14.4%
- Math Upgrading: 10.9%

**Beyond Food, a new initiative at Edmonton's Food Bank, now offers all of the above services. Please see the last page of this report for more information.**

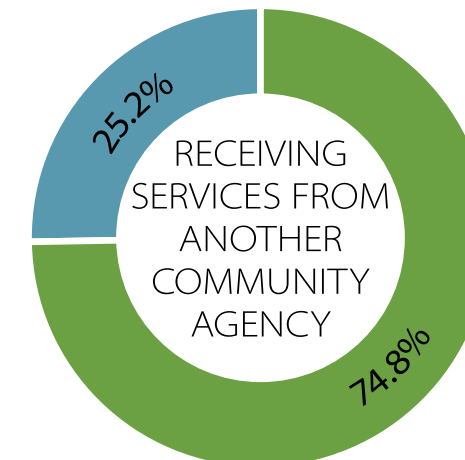


- First Time
- Twice
- More than Twice



- More than \$500
- \$400-\$500
- \$200-\$400
- Less than \$200

- No
- Yes



## CLIENT STORIES

*"I figure I get \$100 worth of food each month from the Food Bank. That's how much more money I would need not to depend on them."*

- Single Client, 50

*"Every day, we miss one meal but sometimes my boss will buy me a meal for lunch."*

- Mother, 48

# PROFILES OF SUB-GROUPS

With the help of Edmonton Social Planning Council's expertise with data analysis, we were able to take a closer look at some key groups of clients to see if their needs differ from the overall group of survey respondents. Here is what we found.

## People Over 50 Years Old

About one-third of respondents are 50 years of age or older. This group is:

- More likely to be unemployed for a longer period of time.
- Less likely to be looking for work.
- More likely to rate their own health (and that of their family) as being poor.

## Married and Couples

One-third of the people we spoke to indicated they were either married or in a common law relationship. This group is:

- More likely to run out of money later in the month compared to respondents who are single, divorced or widowed, despite the fact that this group tends to live in larger households.
- Less likely to not have food for one day or longer during the past year.
- Less likely to be connected to support services other than the Food Bank.

## Living on Alberta Works

Alberta Works is the basic income support program available through the Government of Alberta. Almost half (46.5%) of survey respondents depend on Alberta Works. This group shows significant variation from the overall group of respondents. In particular, they are:

- More likely to be living in larger households.
- More likely to have less education.
- More likely not to have worked for longer periods of time.
- Significantly more likely to run out of money earlier in the month.
- More likely to rate their health as poor.
- More likely to be connected to a range of support services.

## Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH)

Almost 20% of respondents (18.5%) receive AISH. This group is:

- More likely not to have worked for longer periods of time.
- Less likely to be looking for work.
- More likely to report their health (and that of their family) as being poor.



## CONCLUDING WORDS

During the survey, we consistently ran into people who were in survival mode. Many survey participants seemed resigned to their situation: income was not going to change, jobs were hard to secure, housing costs were not likely to decrease and food remains optional by the end of the month.

It was not, however, a picture of complete despair. We heard many stories about neighbours helping neighbours; parishioners and clergy lending a comforting ear and in just about all cases, Food Bank clients making sure their children were fed. It is all part of a community coming together in a time of economic and personal stress.

This survey provides some important findings about Food Bank clients that can help focus policy and program initiatives aimed at addressing poverty in our city.

### Long-Term Unemployment

One-third of survey respondents have not worked for 1-3 years – they are clearly the people who have been hit hard by the economic downturn in this province. We know from operating our Beyond Food program that we could help more people secure safety tickets if there were additional funds for this purpose. A safety ticket in, for example, construction, first aid, food handling or fork lift operations is often a key prerequisite in securing a job.

### Low-Income

A few key findings emerge from the 2018 survey:

- More people are on Alberta Works income support and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (65% in 2018 vs. 49% in 2015).
- Seven out of ten survey respondents indicated their income is less than \$25K – an increase from 53% in 2015.
- More than half of respondents indicated that they would not need the Food Bank if they could increase their income by \$500 per month.

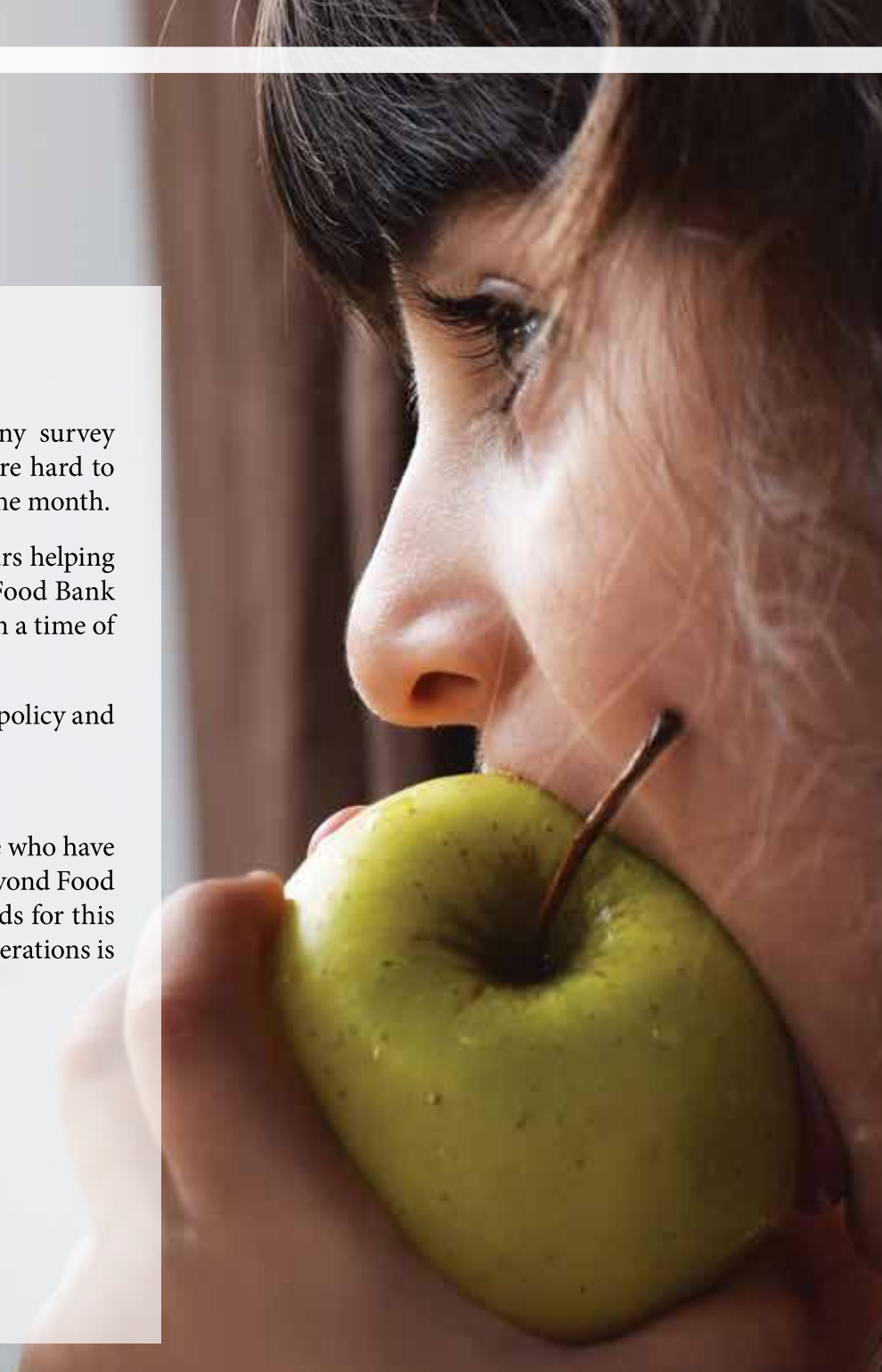
## CONTINUED

The Food Bank is a stop-gap measure to address food needs; while we try to guide people to community and government resources, our capacity is limited. There is a strong case to be made for multiple partners, including government, to come together and work one-on-one with families and individuals to chart a course toward greater stability, even within a struggling economy.

**Stress and Physical Health Cannot Be Ignored**  
Increasing stress and concerns about physical health are significant factors among the people we serve. Almost seven-in-ten respondents said their physical health was poor or fair and half said their stress levels were higher than last year. We need to look at additional avenues so that we can listen and support people struggling with stress. People need access to counselling and stress management resources.

### Affordable Housing

The survey showed that seven out of ten respondents spent more than half of their income on rent. Recent commitments from various levels of government toward affordable housing will be helpful. We hope that governments will be open to adopting strategies from other jurisdictions that leverage government funds so that for-profit and non-profit housing providers will have the needed financial resources to meet the pressing and growing need for affordable housing in our community.



## A FEW WORDS OF APPRECIATION

From early June until the end of July 2018, a combination of four social work students from Norquest College, a hearty crew of Edmonton Food Bank volunteers and staff spoke to 505 Food Bank clients. Interviews took place at the Main Food Bank and at 18 food depots across the city. At the depots, we spoke to people in chapels, offices, vestibules and, on occasion, while they were packing their food.

Each interview took about 15-20 minutes and most importantly provided community members the opportunity to tell us their stories. We thank all the people who kindly shared their experiences with us and the depots who hosted our conversations.

Edmonton's Food Bank works with and distributes food to over 250 agencies, churches and food depots in the city. These partnerships not only ensure that food is distributed, but also ensure that programming is collaborative and community-based with a strong focus on client needs.

Thank you to the following community depots that hosted survey interviewers:

- Anawim Place, Bethel Christian Reformed Community Church, Crystal Kids
- Emmaus Lutheran Church, Holyrood Mennonite Church, Inglewood Christian Reformed Church
- Islamic Family & Social Services Association, Maranatha Christian Reformed Church
- McClure United Church, Millwoods Pentecostal Church, Millwoods United Church
- North Edmonton Christian Fellowship, Salvation Army (downtown), St. Anthony's Parish Church
- St. Anthony's Ukrainian Orthodox Church, St. Herman's Orthodox Church,
- St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Unitarian Church

Thank you to the Student Volunteers from Norquest College:

Dylan Williams, Ishan Dahir, Kemi Oluwole, Marie Ishimwe

Thank you to Edmonton's Food Bank Volunteers:

Teresa Atterbury, Susan Clark, Eric Delfs, Laura Delfs, Peggy Hryniowski, Ross Logan, Don Lore, Richard Ouellet

Thank you to Edmonton Social Planning Council:

Yasmin Hussein, Susan Morrissey, Sandra Ngo

Thank you to Partners:

**Salvation Army:** Christina Clapham, Stephanie Getcke, Eric Schiller, David Waterman

**Islamic Family & Social Services Association:** Asma El Weslati, Seema Khawaja, Henna Khawja, Reema Mostapha

Thank you to Staff at Edmonton's Food Bank:

Tamisan Bencz-Knight, David Berger, Tracey Gilchrist, Roberta Hill, Judy Yawney

## ABOUT EDMONTON'S FOOD BANK

Mission Statement

“To be stewards in the collection of surplus and donated food for the effective distribution, free of charge, to people in need in our community while seeking solutions to the causes of hunger.”

Edmonton's Food Bank was established as the Edmonton Gleaners Association in 1981 to address hunger in Edmonton. While some individuals and families do access services directly from Edmonton's Food Bank, the organization is a central warehouse and referral centre for a network of over 250 agencies, schools, and churches offering food services to people in need. Food services are offered in meal, snack, and hamper form depending on the target group, need, and resources of the agency or church.

In addition to working with the community to address immediate food needs, Edmonton's Food Bank has made a commitment towards long-term solutions to the causes of hunger. This activity takes two forms. When possible, Edmonton's Food Bank tries to assist people with other options to reduce the need for the Food Bank. In addition to assisting individuals with their food insecurity, the Food Bank does public education and advocacy concerning the societal causes of hunger and poverty.

While still maintaining its original mandate of gleaning food on behalf of soup kitchens and shelters, Edmonton's Food Bank has responded to new and emerging needs. The Food Bank remains confident that the continuing goodwill of the community will allow it to successfully face and overcome future challenges collaboratively with new, creative approaches and programs.

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.edmontonsfoodbank.com](http://www.edmontonsfoodbank.com)

If you have comments about this report, please let us know.

[info@edmontonsfoodbank.com](mailto:info@edmontonsfoodbank.com)



# BEYOND FOOD!

Need a job? Need help with English, Math, or budgeting?  
**WE CAN HELP YOU!**



## A new program that goes **BEYOND FOOD**

Beyond Food is a new community partnership initiated by Edmonton's Food Bank that brings together the strengths of eight community agencies and the City of Edmonton to offer a range of services that are helping Edmontonians improve their situation during the economic downturn.

Beyond Food opened its doors in mid-November 2017 at Edmonton's Food Bank Annex building at 11434 – 120 Street. Available services include resume preparation, job interview practice, job search assistance, and help securing safety tickets.

The partners include Boyle Street Community Services, Bissell Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association, City of Edmonton, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, The Learning Centre, Habitat for Humanity, and Catholic Social Services.

In addition to employment readiness services, Beyond Food offers English and Math upgrading, budgeting advice, personal counselling and information about affordable housing.

Since its opening in November 2017, more than 300 community members have used the free service. The program works on a drop-in basis and is available without an appointment, Monday to Friday from 9 am to 4 pm.

“There is more work for us to do to connect with city employers and expand our staffing resources, but we have had a good start and look forward to addressing the unmet needs of the people we serve.” – Marjorie Bencz, CM, Executive Director, Edmonton's Food Bank.

## NEED HELP WITH THESE FREE SERVICES? WE CAN HELP YOU!

- ✓ Resumes
  - ✓ Job Search
  - ✓ Job Interview Practice
  - ✓ Safety Tickets
- Construction, First Aid, Food Safety & More

- ✓ Budgeting
  - ✓ Math and English Upgrading
  - ✓ One-on-One Support
- Counselling, Family Violence Support, Recreation, Links to Landlords, Newcomer Settlement & More



Monday to Friday, 9am – 4pm  
Edmonton's Food Bank, Annex Building, 11434 – 120 Street  
780.425.2133 [www.edmontonsfoodbank.com](http://www.edmontonsfoodbank.com)



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS AT EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL FOR THEIR EXPERTISE IN MAKING THIS REPORT A REALITY.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Providing food to our neighbours in need is a good thing, but it will not solve hunger in the long term. We ask that you share this report and our contact information with others. We encourage you to write and talk to decision-makers about changes to income-support programs and about how housing can become more affordable in our community. Poverty and hunger are complex issues that require proactive, comprehensive action.

In the meantime, people need to eat. Please consider a contribution of time, food and/or money to Edmonton's Food Bank. Your support is appreciated!



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Edmonton, AB T5G 2Y2

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