

Assessing the Good Food Box

**by Marilyn Brownlee
& Allison Cammer**

Community-University Institute for Social Research

CUI SR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUI SR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluates applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUI SR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUI SR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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ABSTRACT

The Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP) has operated the Good Food Box program since 1997. In that time, it has experienced steady growth in the number of households it serves, currently distributing between 1,000 and 1,800 boxes of fresh produce each month to approximately 75 volunteer-run drop-off locations. This is a vital service, as previous studies have shown that access to fresh foods within Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods (Westmount, Pleasant Hill, King George, Caswell, Riversdale) is limited.

This project examined the impact of the Good Food Box program based on two of its stated goals: increasing access to affordable, healthy food and promoting healthy eating. Forty-five households from Quint Development Corporation's co-operative housing program in the city core and key informants from the Good Food Box program, including volunteers, neighbourhood co-ordinators, and workers, participated in the project. Three interview sessions and two focus groups were conducted to gather data during the research project.

Relevant findings include the importance of providing support for new Good Food Box patrons, especially in terms of scheduling and ordering. A positive relationship between the presence of healthy foods in the home and healthy eating behaviours was also observed. The community-building aspect of the housing program and its interrelationship with food was an additional interesting finding.

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, the Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP) has been concerned with long-term solutions that address root causes of hunger. In the early 1990s, CHEP produced a strategic report that outlined long-term solutions using a community development approach. According to the Simon Fraser University Community Economic Development Centre, community economic development is a “process by which communities can initiate and generate their own solutions to their common economic problems and thereby build long-term community capacity and foster the integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives” (Simon Fraser University Community Economic Development Centre, 2003). This means that communities work toward generating and keeping money within their neighbourhoods to create a more sustainable economy. The Good Food Box program is an example of community economic development in Saskatoon.

In 1995, Quint Development Corporation (better known simply as Quint) was created after five core neighbourhood community associations came together to address issues of absentee landlords, poverty, and incredibly high residential and student turnover. Quint’s mandate is to improve the social and economic well-being of Saskatoon’s core neighbourhoods through a community development approach. One way that Quint has carried out their mandate is through the affordable housing program, which is designed to promote home ownership, community building, and financial security through development of several homeownership co-operatives. To be eligible for assistance, Quint co-op members cannot qualify for a traditional mortgage, must have a household income of under \$30,000, and have children under 18 years of age still living at home. Each housing co-op has approximately ten families living in and owning their own homes in the core neighbourhoods. Each member has responsibilities to his or her particular co-op and must contribute to a capital maintenance fund that is maintained by the co-op. After five years, co-op members have the choice to either stay with their co-op or assume complete ownership and responsibility for their homes.

In 1997, CHEP began the Good Food Box program (GFB) to utilize the benefits of bulk buying and increase the intake of good food. GFB is a not-for-profit, alternative food distribution system that provides a variety of high quality, fresh, nutritious, and affordable produce. Individual families, as part of neighbourhood based groups run by a volunteer coordinator, pay for and order good food boxes in advance. Households have five types of boxes from which to choose. The small and regular “fruit and vegetable” boxes contain approximately 15 and 25 pounds of various vegetables and fruit, respectively. The “fruit boxes” come in small and large sizes, while the “eco box” contains certified organic, local pesticide-free fruits and vegetables.

GFB staff purchase food in bulk from local producers and wholesalers. Volunteers and staff pack the boxes, which are then delivered to neighbourhood depots. This program

enables families to access nutritious fresh food that looks, smells, and tastes delicious. It also benefits families because of the economic savings of buying in bulk. The boxes also contain recipes and information about food and nutrition. The program is the second largest in Canada, packing up to 2000 boxes a month.

GFB has five goals that it strives to meet:

- Increasing access to good food
- Encouraging healthy eating patterns
- Building community
- Providing nutritional information
- Supporting a sustainable food system by purchasing food from local producers

This project was designed to examine two of these goals: increasing access to good food and encouraging healthy eating patterns. Another aspect of this project was to examine both perceptions of GFB and the concerns of program participants. If low-income families do not perceive GFB as good value for their money, they will not take part, even if it is delivered to their neighbourhood. Although regular price comparisons reveal that Good Food Box prices are 10% to 25% lower than those of grocery stores, there are still those who feel that GFB does not provide value for the money.

Volunteer neighbourhood co-ordinators promote participation in the Good Food Box. Realizing that this is a huge undertaking, do low-income families new to GFB need additional support to connect to the program? Does it require additional work by coordinators to maintain new families' involvement? By partnering with housing co-op members from Quint, these goals were examined as they pertain to those living in core neighbourhoods.

METHODS

This assessment project's goal was to ascertain GFB accessibility barriers for housing co-op members in core neighbourhoods, and to explore people's relationship with food and how that was affected by receiving a Good Food Box. To measure these, three main themes were identified:

- Does GFB improve access to food?
- Does GFB's presence affect participants' perceived eating habits?
- How do people perceive and experience GFB?

Semi-structured questionnaire/interviews were developed to explore these areas, then focus group discussions were used to elaborate and expand on the information gathered.

A GFB facilitator attended seven Quint housing co-operative meetings to discuss the project and recruit participants. These participants were told that in exchange for their involvement in interviews and focus groups they would be given two free and two 50% subsidized regular Good Food Boxes. In total, 42 households chose to participate in the project.

During the project's introduction phase, participants completed an intake interview where demographic information was collected, participation explained, and consent given. The project's measurement section was divided into three phases of two months each (four Good Food Box cycles), with each phase increasing participants' personal and financial responsibility. For the first phase, Good Food Boxes were 100% subsidized and the first order placed for the participant. During this phase, participants were closely monitored. Each time a participant did not place her/his order, a reminder call was made to discuss why the order was not placed. Similarly, a reminder call was placed to anyone who failed to pick up their Good Food Box on specified dates.

In addition to this support, participants were invited to contribute to a standardized questionnaire/interview at the end of the first phase. The questionnaire was mailed to participants approximately one week before interviews were conducted to allow time to contemplate responses. Interviews were completed in-person (when possible) or via telephone. This questionnaire was intended to capture participants' first impressions of GFB, gain some relevant socio-demographic information about participants, learn what it was like to receive a Good Food Box and how it was incorporated into household life, and stimulate some initial thought and discussion about food. A complete list of questions asked is provided in **Appendix A**.

During the project's second phase, participants were given a 50% subsidy for a Good Food Box (making each family responsible for 50% of the cost for a Good Food Box) and less support was provided (e.g. fewer reminder calls, follow-up calls, making exceptions for ordering deadlines). At the end of this phase, a second standardized questionnaire/interview was conducted to further explore attitudes surrounding access to healthy food, satisfaction with the contents of a Good Food Box, barriers encountered when ordering or receiving a Good Food Box, and perceived changes to diet and/or household life that occurred through involvement with GFB. The questionnaires were conducted in-person, via telephone, or in writing. A complete list of questions is provided in **Appendix B**.

Phase three involved no subsidy (i.e. participants were responsible for the full cost of Good Food Boxes ordered) and participants were treated in the same manner as any other GFB patron. During this phase, a focus group discussion was organized to facilitate

informal sharing of experiences between research participants and collectively discuss potential solutions to some of the barriers identified in the interviews. A semi-structured format was chosen to stimulate discussion and explore tangents identified by participants. The questions posed to initiate discussion can be found in **Appendix C**. A comfortable, informal setting was chosen to reduce formal barriers. All participants were invited to attend and childcare was provided. At the end of the focus group discussion, a cooking session was organized where participants could continue their discussion while learning new recipes based on foods commonly found in a Good Food Box. At the event’s close, two representatives from the Home Economists Association of Saskatchewan presented participants with a manual entitled “Living Simply” and explained its use as a cookbook, household organizer, and financial/health organizer.

At the end of phase three, a third and final questionnaire/interview was conducted. The purpose of this questionnaire was to evaluate participants’ overall experiences, measure any perceived changes to their household organization, regular diets, and satisfaction with GFB, gain insight to potential program improvements, explore the connections made by participants regarding their housing co-op and GFB, and determine whether participants planned to continue using GFB. The complete questionnaire can be found in **Appendix D**.

A focus group discussion was conducted with key GFB stakeholders at the end of phase three. These individuals, representing varied and unique perspectives and experiences, were asked questions similar to those posed to research participants to elaborate on themes and clarify process-related questions. Participants included a GFB employee, a volunteer coordinator of five years, a volunteer who has been involved with GFB since its inception, a new volunteer of three weeks, and a coordinator/GFB packing-day volunteer. The questions used to guide the discussion of the focus group can be found in **Appendix E**. **Table 1** represents breaks down the research design.

Table 1. Research Design.

		Phase one		Phase two		Phase three	
SUBSIDY	INTAKE INTERVIEW	4 regular Good Food Boxes fully subsidized	INTERVIEW	4 regular Good Food Boxes 50% subsidized	INTERVIEW FOCUS GROUP	No subsidy	INTERVIEW FOCUS GROUP
SUPPORT		Reminder calls for ordering and pick-up		Reminder call for pick-up		No reminder call	

RESULTS

All the research participants would be considered low-income households. In order to qualify for a Quint house, members must have annual incomes less than \$30,000 at the time that they are accepted into Quint’s Affordable Housing Program (Quint, 2004). Additionally, 29% of participants reported that they were of visible minority status and 10% of participants were single-mother households. The demographic information for the 42 households who participated in the research study is represented in the **Tables 2, 3, and 4.**

Table 2. Household Size.

Number of Person in Household	Percent of Participants
2	12%
3	31%
4	21%
5	19%
6	7%
7	7%
8	2%

Table 3. Income Source.

Income Source	Percent of Households*
Social Assistance Program	14%
Employment Insurance	12%
Self-employed	5%
Employed	57%
Student Loan/Scholarship/Bursary	14%
Other	21%

*As some of the households reported income from multiple sources, the percentage column does not total 100.

Table 4. Food Source.

Location of Majority of Food Purchases	Percent of Households*
Public Wholesale Outlets	12%
Large Format Stores (e.g. Superstore, Safeway)	81%
Small Format Stores (e.g. Extra Foods)	19%
Department Stores	7%
Convenience Stores	4%
Small Specialty Stores	4%
Farmer's Market or Personal Garden	2%
Dine-In or Take-Out	7%
Community Programs	2%

*As some of the households reported several sources of food purchases, the total percentage is greater than 100.

Although 42 households initially participated in the intake interview, by the second interview nine had discontinued. By the third interview, the participant group was down to 23 households. Reasons given for discontinuing included lack of time and scheduling difficulties with work and school. In nine cases, a reason for discontinuing was not given because the participant could not be reached.

Responses collected from the questionnaire/interviews and through the focus group discussion were quantified whenever appropriate. Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data, identifying common themes, patterns, and trends. A modified form of grounded theory was used to organize participant responses into general areas. Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss, uses open data coding classification to generate themes and conceptual categories. Themes emerge through a process of continual comparison and rigorous data analysis. (Glaser, 1992)

The major patterns identified can be grouped into three over-arching thematic areas: (1) access issues surrounding GFB; (2) eating habits; and (3) capacity building within the community. These issues are addressed later in this report.

ACCESS ISSUES SURROUNDING THE GOOD FOOD BOX

In terms of access, the main areas identified by participants were those of schedules. In the second interview, 34% of participants reported that they had forgotten either to order or pick up their Good Food Box. When asked how improve the GFB ordering/receiving procedure, most suggestions involved a reminder or a variety of options for pick up. In the third interview, issues of location and difficulty regarding transportation and pick up were reported.

During focus group discussion, the main topics of conversation were forgetfulness in ordering or picking up Good Food Boxes, difficulty in coordinating the household budget with ordering Good Food Boxes, and challenges in scheduling and incorporating GFB into daily life. Key stakeholders echoed these statements. Most members have extremely busy schedules and co-ordinators often make exceptions to assist members in accessing a Good Food Box by making reminder calls, driving the Box to a home, keeping the Box overnight for someone, or accepting later payment.

In a related area, participants noted that GFB is an economical, but not necessarily easier, way to get healthy food into households. That is, for some it was as challenging to access GFB as a grocery store.

EATING HABITS

Most participants reported an increased consumption of vegetables and fruit due to receiving a Good Food Box. Many people commented that the presence of fresh produce in their homes increased both the opportunity and the probability of eating fruits and vegetables. In both the interviews and focus groups, it was made clear that the Good Food Box can positively impact eating habits. These findings are in keeping with previous investigations (CHEP, 2000) of GFB, where it was noted that produce availability directly impacted intake.

Most research participants (84%) reported an increase in both their own and their children's intake of fruits and vegetables. Though many reported that they were not able to use all of the Boxes' contents, they displayed a need to account for its entirety by explaining that they gave excess items to friends or family. Several people felt that the Boxes increased their ability to try new foods, noting that they would otherwise not choose to spend limited resources on a new and possibly disliked item. A majority of participants who picked up their Boxes also reported that they had used recipes from the newsletter and discussed them during the focus group.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Initially, participants reported a relationship between housing and food based on economics—that is, a majority stated that the cost of housing affects the amount of money available to purchase food, which ultimately affects food choices. Later discussion had participants connecting the co-operative housing strategy and the not-for-profit GFB system, regarding them as ways to help each other collectively. They noted that co-operative housing and GFB were both linked to the community and about people supporting each other.

A notable progression in participant perceptions was observed. In the third questionnaire, some firm links were reported: community involvement and support for fellow community members and the local economy were all mentioned as aspects of

both GFB and the Quint housing co-operative. Many stated that both GFB and Quint were a form of commitment to community improvement. Participants were also concerned that their forgotten Boxes not be wasted. One said that she did not mind losing her own Box through forgetfulness as long as it would be used somewhere within her neighbourhood.

Many research participants asked questions about the co-operative grocery store after hearing about it on the news, so a decision was made to include questions about this initiative in the second and third questionnaires. A majority said that the store was needed and that they would help out with its operation as best they could. Participants reported that they felt that they could make GFB work in their community.

LIMITATIONS

Though measures were taken to control for bias, this project was not without its limitations. For one, research participants did not constitute a truly representative population of those living in core neighbourhoods because they were part of a distinct social program through the Quint housing co-operative. This may reduce the results' applicability to the generalized demographic of core neighbourhoods. Additionally, bias might have been introduced through inclusion of a GFB employee as part of the research team. Although her position provided many advantages, such as relationship development and an in-depth understanding of the program itself, research participants might have given more favourable responses in an effort to please her or fear of insulting a program that they may have associated with her. As well, due to several research participants' discontinuation, crucial information about possible access issues or reasons why some do not remain GFB patrons may not have been fully captured. This area warrants further research.

DISCUSSION

ACCESS TO GOOD FOOD

In this project, accessibility to good food was explored by working with forty-five families in Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods. At present, there is no full service grocery store in five core neighbourhoods (Caswell, Pleasant Hill, Riversdale, King George, and Westmount). This means that people who do not have easy access to transportation experience hardship and often go without good food. Considering that these neighbourhoods are among Saskatoon's poorest economically (City Of Saskatoon, 1998), access to transportation may be difficult, which makes it even more difficult to bring healthy, nutritious food into their homes. In one interview, a woman explained this challenge:

Think of it this way: I need to get a carton of milk. At the convenience store, the milk costs \$2.45. At the Superstore, it costs \$2.00. Now, if I want to go to Superstore, I have to get someone to look after my children or bring them myself. I have to find \$2.00 to catch the bus, I have to walk four blocks to catch the bus, wait for the bus to come, sit on the bus for fifteen minutes, get the milk, wait for the next bus, pay another \$2.00, come home, pay the babysitter, and finally get to have the milk. Now, what would you do? Get the cheaper milk at the Superstore or get the more expensive milk at the convenience store across the street? I get the more expensive milk.

The decision to purchase at a convenience store is financially responsible and well planned when circumstances such as these are considered. Paying extra money to buy the more expensive milk is still cheaper than purchasing it from a less expensive grocery store.

What people buy when they go to a cheaper grocery store can also be problematic. Many interviewees said that when they make it to the grocery store, they often buy food that keeps (i.e. not spoil) for at least a month. This meant buying large amounts of dry and processed goods, and little or no fresh fruits and vegetables.

Imagine trying to lug around 10 lbs of potatoes. It's really hard. Fresh produce is not only heavy, but it also doesn't keep as long as the dried stuff. I go shopping once a month. I have to buy stuff that will last that long. Apples and green peppers and tomatoes just don't last.

GFB is based on these exact concerns. By providing drop-off points in every core neighbourhood and paired with bi-monthly food delivery, fresh fruits and vegetables become more accessible and easier to transport to homes.

It's been so great getting the Good Food Box. I don't have to buy as much food at the grocery store and the food is fresh.

Another participant commented on the food's freshness:

You can tell that the fruits and vegetables from the Good Food Box are fresh. I forgot about the green pepper once and when I remembered it a week later, it was still good. To me this is a sure sign that these vegetables and fruits are good quality and they'll last longer than the stuff we get at the grocery store.

But does GFB actually increase access to good food? Certainly, the food is available at drop off points located in a variety of places where access to food may be otherwise limited, but does GFB support and nurture its participants enough to increase accessibility in the core? While conducting interviews, gathering information, and talking to GFB key stakeholders, a number of important barriers were identified that hinder or prevent

low-income families from becoming involved with GFB. Major reported hindrances included: GFB's ordering and delivery process, volunteer neighbourhood co-ordinators' dedication, and, most importantly, general perceptions of GFB.

GFB Ordering and Delivery Process

One of the most pertinent barriers that the project came up against is GFB's ordering and delivering process. Interviews revealed that new participants in GFB believed that the process and routine of ordering and picking up their Boxes was difficult.

Getting used to ordering and picking up my Boxes has been hard. I just have to get a routine going.

While some project participants found it difficult to remember to regularly order, others had trouble remembering to pick up their Boxes on delivery day.

I just can't seem to remember to pick up my Box. It's like a mental block or something. Or, maybe it's just that I'm too busy doing other things. I like getting the Good Food Box when I remember but I would prefer to have a grocery store. That way I wouldn't need to remember to pick up my food on specific days.

Focus group participants also expressed responsibility and often self-blame for failing to remember, but had very few suggestions for GFB to improve the process.

I just can't remember to order my Box. I get the Box on the Wednesday and the next Monday it's order day. It just seems too soon to order another Box when I just got the last Box. But what can you do? It's my fault that I can't remember, not yours.

I have so much going on in my life. I am going to school right now to become a teacher's assistant. I also have four kids that I'm raising on my own. It's great that the Good Food Box is around, but I just don't have the time to remember to order, pick up, pay, and return the totes.

While the ordering and delivery process can be a little daunting, interviewees all agreed that it did not need to change. They commented, however, that how GFB administers the program could be improved to provide additional support for newcomers. GFB has had many who have been involved for extended periods of time, but it is also true that many have tried the program but never ordered again. The reasons for quitting, however, are somewhat unknown. A majority of participants in this project reported satisfaction with GFB and indicated that they planned to continue purchasing.

It is CHEP's goal to determine the reasons for customer discontinuation. This study's findings lead to the question, does the program need to have a better support system in place for those who need to be reminded? Perhaps there should be more

supports in place for those who want or need it, particularly new members. For example, when an individual becomes a member of the Saskatoon Co-op, they are asked to fill out a satisfaction survey two months following their initial membership registration. Survey questions include staff approachability and product cost and quality. When a new customer orders from GFB, perhaps a similar survey could be used. This survey would not only ask their opinions, but also seek to keep them in the program by making them feel a valued part of GFB.

How can the program address the issue of forgetting to order and pick up Good Food Boxes? This program is modelled on a collective action framework, which means that both the participant and community organization play a role in GFB's operation. While it is partly the participant's responsibility to order and pick up her/his box, GFB's number one priority is servicing individuals at a high risk for nutritional inadequacy due to low income and/or living in core neighbourhoods. One suggestion made in the group interview was to implement an automated call service similar to that of the Saskatoon Public Library. Each order and delivery day, an automated message would call participants to remind them to order or pick up their Good Food Boxes. Once participants felt that a pattern was established, they could choose to discontinue the reminder message. Additionally, GFB could encourage people to pre-order boxes whenever money becomes available in their households.

Volunteer Neighbourhood Co-ordinators

GFB volunteer neighbourhood co-ordinators play a central role to the program's success. One of their most important jobs is to link GFB staff to actual participants. They not only take orders from participants, they also pass on comments, questions, concerns, and complaints to GFB staff. Most co-ordinators contact each customer at least once each week trying to get recyclable totes returned, asking if they want to order a Good Food Box, and reminding them to pick up their Boxes. Neighbourhood co-ordinators also contact the GFB office, phone to place their group order, and drop off money. Their job is invaluable and staff is fully aware that the program would not be sustainable or successful without these volunteers. Co-ordinators dedication was evident at the focus group discussion.

I think it is up to me as a coordinator to phone the day before and remind people.

You get to know the people in your group and you know who you have to remind and who you have to call and build it into a consistent thing.

I will deliver Boxes to certain people ... some people don't have a car or can't get to my house so I just do it. Otherwise, some of them wouldn't be able to get a Box.

Unfortunately, the GFB office occasionally receives calls about co-ordinators being tired, needing a break, or asking staff to stop referring new people to them. This matter requires further analysis and thought. At CHEP's children's nutrition programs, food co-ordinators at each school receive an honorarium in recognition for the work that they do each day. Perhaps if given an incentive such as an honorarium, neighbourhood co-ordinators would be willing to maintain or assume extra responsibilities.

The key stakeholder group described their involvement with GFB in terms of commitment and pride. Perhaps their personal enthusiasm and dedication could be fostered and directed toward mentoring new members. When describing why each maintains involvement with GFB, a general theme of political activism and departure from the status quo was evident.

The Good Food Box program ties it all in with food and family and community and health in a general sense. I like that.

It's alternative and it somewhat bypasses the corporate system. It's local. I like that.

It's a political statement. It's different than the impersonal experience of a grocery store where you plunk your money down on the counter—you have a connection to your food.

Supporting the well-being of neighbourhood co-ordinators is, and should be, one of GFB's top priorities.

Good Food Box Perceptions

A third barrier to accessing GFB involves common perceptions about the program itself. When asked at the key stakeholders meeting what hinders people from purchasing a Good Food Box, all interviewees agreed that the manner in which Saskatoon residents perceive GFB is the number one barrier. When CHEP began ten years ago, the program's focus was feeding children healthy breakfasts in schools to improve behaviour and concentration and prevent hunger. However, over the years, CHEP has grown to include collective kitchens, GFB, community gardening, nutrition programs and events, community economic development in Saskatoon, and involvement in food security issues. While CHEP still assists communities to operate nutrition programs for children at schools and centres around the city, it has evolved and taken a more proactive stance in enhancing food security.

A common perception with which GFB is often faced is that it is a program for poor people. GFB regularly receives phone calls from people asking: “How do you apply for a Good Food Box?”; “Do we have to show ID to be able to get a Good Food Box?”; “What is the income cut off for a Good Food Box?”; “Is Good Food Box a fundraiser to help feed hungry kids?”; and “Do you give away hampers of food for people who are poor?” GFB’s advertising literature, it should be noted, does not imply that it is only for poor people, a fundraiser for hungry children, or an emergency response organization.

This misperception is also apparent when GFB is out in the larger community. Standing at a GFB display board recently, a city councillor approached the table and began asking questions about GFB drop-off points in Saskatoon. After viewing a map of the drop-off points, he was surprised that there was a drop-off point in an area with a higher income bracket.

A second example occurred when a number of schools from around the city hosted a fundraising barbeque at each of the Saskatoon Co-ops in mid-June. When a neighbourhood newspaper asked about CHEP, the barbeque organizer told them that it was a program that feeds hungry children. In this instance, families who are not poor believed that they were not eligible for the GFB service because it is a CHEP program.

While conducting interviews for this project, it became apparent that some participants thought that GFB was only for poor people. Ordering a Good Food Box might be perceived as indicative of poverty, and nobody wants to have attached to them the stigma of poverty.

The reason why I haven’t gotten the Good Food Box is because our friends told us that it’s only for poor people. I don’t want our family to be thought of as a poor family accepting handouts from others.

Alternately, some who perceive GFB as a food assistance program might not even inquire about the program—that is, they do not feel that they should be taking from those in need. This prevents many who may be interested in supporting the local economy from considering it an option.

Another interesting misperception is that GFB caters to middle class families without consideration of low-income families that order the box. A neighbourhood group coordinator in one core neighbourhood quit organizing his group because he claimed that there were too many exotic vegetables in the Box and not enough staple foods (carrots, potatoes, onions, and apples). The question arises: how to communicate that GFB is for everyone?

One suggestion was to change the type of Good Food Boxes to suit different groups’ needs. This would mean creation of a Box containing only staple foods and another with a wider variety. This arrangement, however, may result in an unintentional split

based on participants' income. GFB's goal is certainly not to perpetuate this type of segregation. One project participant reported that she likes the Good Food Box because she receives items that would otherwise be too expensive to buy at the grocery store:

I feel like I'm trying new vegetables, more than just the basics, which is what we normally have.

I like the surprises. We can't usually buy the stuff that comes in the Good Food Box.

There's lots of good stuff in there. It's good that it's for everybody.

It is apparent that not all low-income people want a Box containing only staple foods, but rather prefer a Box that they know goes to everybody, not just poor or rich people.

If GFB created a second box of exotic or more expensive items, it would likely create a schism among participants detrimental to the mandate of CHEP and GFB. Development of different boxes might fragment the community and label groups as "special interest" or "needy." By delivering the same product selections to each participant, GFB promotes access and availability to everyone involved.

GFB is an alternative food distribution system that is neither a charity nor a market model. While a charity-based food initiative may include free soup kitchens, food banks, or free food hampers, a market-based food initiative would include shopping at grocery or convenience stores. GFB occupies a space between these two models. While GFB strives to be self-sustaining, it also makes food more accessible to those who may not be able to afford grocery store produce prices. It also facilitates, provides, and shares nutrition and food system information with each Good Food Box.

Addressing Improving Healthy Eating Habits

This research project found that GFB is very successful in encouraging and promoting healthy eating habits. Positive responses were given when asked whether GFB increased consumption of nutritious food in households. In the first interview, many participants expressed dissatisfaction with their cooking:

I am just sick of cooking the same old meals.

By the second interview, the general response to eating good food had changed. One woman explained her amazement and change of lifestyle since she began receiving a Good Food Box:

Since I began getting involved with this project, my life has totally changed. I've changed the way my kids and I eat. Instead of having chips for them as an after school snack, there's a fruit bowl for them

to snack on. I think I've lost over 10 pounds since I've gotten off the chips and gotten on the fruits and vegetables.

Other project participants explained how their children's lunches and eating habits had changed for the better. One boy said that Good Food Box potatoes were the only kind that he would eat. Another girl refused to eat any other fruit or vegetable except for the carrots from a Good Food Box. Two sisters planned a barbeque supper based on items from their Good Food Box. The lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers were reserved for the salad, while the celery was reserved as an appetizer. It seems that GFB not only improves adults' eating habits, but their children as well.

The project found that the newsletter was a beneficial means of informing people of new ways to prepare good food. Most project participants used the newsletter recipes and nutrition information. Although some recipes required buying more groceries, most said that the recipes were practical, clear, and provided good meal options. They especially enjoyed the nutrition information, and the recipes gave them good ideas for experimentation.

I really liked the recipes, the cost comparison, and finding out where the food was from.

The feature food recipes are good—they give you good ideas. Even if I don't like that recipe, it makes me think about expanding cooking ideas.

Improved eating habits were also demonstrated at the focus group discussions. Following the group discussion, participants, including two members of the Home Economist's Association of Saskatchewan, took part in a cooking session. Participants prepared a variety of foods from a handbook called "Living Simply," published by the Home Economist's Association of Saskatchewan. This handbook was designed to provide a broad overview of basic cooking skills, easy recipes for busy households, wellness issues, and home budget tips. The two home economists also presented skills, tips, and ideas on how to make quick and healthy meals.

Community Capacity Building

This project encouraged participants and researchers to think about "the bigger picture" in relation to food security, housing, community, and connections between these social issues. When making initial contacts and presentations, potential participants were encouraged to "map out" their last meal. Where did the food that they ate come from? Did they know where the vegetables were grown? How difficult was it to access groceries? Were there any other barriers to access, such as taxi fares or babysitter costs? Although some had never considered where their food came from (one individual responded, "my food comes from the grocery store, that's as much as I know"), others had much to say about how hard it was to get food into their home.

As the project interviews continued, more involved questions were asked, such as “How do you see your housing co-op and Good Food Box working together?” At first, few had considered how these two issues could be linked. Many had to be given examples of what other people had said to prompt their thinking. However, by the last questionnaire, most participants had comments about the relationships between housing and food.

I see housing and food as both being necessities in my family. But when times are tough, my food budget is the first thing that gets cut if my car breaks down or if I need to make a mortgage payment.

Since I’ve become a co-op member, I don’t have to pay such huge rent. My mortgage is much cheaper than the rent I was paying before. So, I have more money to spend on food, which is great.

Housing and food are both basic needs. They’re necessities. But food is the first to go after bills—it’s housing before food. I eat less so that the kids can have more when things are tight.

By making these connections, awareness of food security issues were heightened. Quint and CHEP currently have attracted funding to develop a business plan for a community owned grocery store in one of the core neighbourhoods. Project participants were generally receptive to this idea. Most stated that they would shop there if the store carried reasonably priced quality foods.

Building connections on these seemingly separate social issues is an important aspect of any community-based program. By focusing on the interdependent relationships of food, housing, and community, it is apparent that alternative and co-operative solutions can improve social issues in core neighbourhoods.

I find that when my family’s housing situation wasn’t good, neither were our food habits. Once my housing became stable, I was able to provide my family with better food.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When reviewing what participants had said about access to good food and improving their family’s eating habits in relation to GFB, many had pertinent recommendations as to how the program could better meet these goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS ACCESSIBILITY TO GOOD FOOD

These following are suggestions that could help improve access to good food. The recommendations can be mixed and matched to accommodate GFB's current infrastructure.

- Draw up a “Forget Me Not” List of everyone who wants to be reminded to order their Boxes. A community person or a GFB staff member could phone once a week on order days to remind people to contact their co-ordinators.
- Recruit more neighbourhood co-ordinators in core neighbourhoods to avoid coordinator burnout and improve flexibility in picking up Boxes.
- Provide neighbourhood co-ordinators with an honorarium to keep them dedicated and focused. This honorarium could be used as recognition for their important work.
- Open a community-operated grocery or produce store with affordable quality food.
- Operate a travelling market to sell produce at designated points around core neighbourhoods.
- Actively promote GFB as a program for everybody, not just particular groups. Perhaps CHEP and GFB could prepare a press release specifically focusing on the “food available to all” concept.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS IMPROVING HEALTHY EATING HABITS

These recommendations can also be mixed and matched.

- Create a more active partnership with the Collective Kitchens program. Perhaps an ongoing Good Food Box Collective Kitchen could be instituted using recipes from the GFB newsletter or using Good Food Box items.
- Provide a more extensive recipe column in Good Food Boxes with a focus on simple and quick recipes.
- Create a Good Food Box Cookbook of past recipes using Good Food Box ingredients. GFB could use this as a fundraising activity or promotional activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCHERS

- Provide volunteer neighbourhood co-ordinators with a small honorarium. Although co-ordinators currently receive a \$5.00 coupon towards a Good Food Box for every 10 boxes that they order, increasing that amount to one free regular Good Food Box or granting a small honorarium might be more appropriate.

- Employ a community person to create a phoning tree to remind customers to order and pick up their Good Food Boxes. This would be an optional extra support for new people to the program.
- Create and manage a new customer or member survey to better assess participants' needs.
- Conduct a promotion campaign to explain GFB and its availability.
- Create a short-term subsidy for newcomers of GFB to encourage long-term participation.

CONCLUSION

This project examined two of the five GFB goals: improving healthy eating habits and increasing access to good food. GFB can be of great benefit to residents of Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods. Although there are challenges that require attention, the program has a positive impact on the lives of those who access it. Strategies to enhance GFB accessibility by combating misperceptions, addressing neighbourhood coordinator needs, exploring additional tasks with an honorarium in place, and supporting newcomers to the program could significantly improve GFB's impact throughout Saskatoon.

Improved eating habits and increased awareness of individual and community capacity building are the strongest arguments for increasing this program's scope within core neighbourhoods. GFB does a good job of informing people how they can improve their eating habits by holding collective kitchens, providing a newsletter in every box with food preparation ideas, and simply getting fresh produce into households. Initiating thoughts about links between housing, food, and community is an effective means of exploring how core neighbourhoods could increase food and housing security by understanding the two issues as interconnected.

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Appendix A. First Questionnaire and Demographic Data.

Demographic Data – Please feel free to skip or not answer questions

1. How long have you been a member of your housing co-op?
 - a. under six months
 - b. 6 months – 1 year
 - c. 1-2 years
 - d. 2-3 years
 - e. 3-4 years
 - f. 4-5 years
 - g. more than 5 years

2. In general, do any members of your family require special diets? (Open ended)
 - a. Yes, (Please explain) _____
 - b. No

3. Including yourself, how many people live in your household? _____
Is that also the number of people who eat meals on most days at your house? ____
If no, how many people in your house eat meals on most days at your house? ____

- 4a. How many adults over the age of 18 years live in your household on most days?

- b. How many youth aged 13-17 years live in your household on most days? _____
- c. How many children aged 5-12 years live in your household on most days? _____
- d. How many toddlers aged 2-5 years live in your household on most days? _____
- e. How many infants aged birth to 1 year live in your household on most days? _____

5. What is your family's primary source of income?
 - a. Social Assistance Program
 - b. Employment Insurance
 - c. Self-Employed

- d. Employed
 - e. Student Loans/Scholarships
 - f. Other _____
 - g. Prefer not to answer
6. Do you consider your family to be a member of a visible minority? If so, which one?
- a. Yes. Which one? _____
 - b. No
7. What neighbourhood do you live in?
- a. Pleasant Hill
 - b. Riversdale
 - c. Caswell
 - d. Westmount
 - e. King George
8. What school(s) do your children attend?

Intake Interview Questionnaire

1. Have you ordered a Good Food Box in the last three months?
- a. No
 - b. Yes (go to question #3)
2. If No to question #1, have you ever ordered a Good Food Box?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
3. What do you think of the Good Food Box, whether or not you currently order it? (For example, you think it's a great deal or you feel like you waste produce).

4. Where do you get the majority of your food from? (Circle as many as you want)
 - a. Public wholesale outlets (e.g. Real Canadian Wholesale Club, Costco)
 - b. Large format stores (e.g. Safeway, Superstore, Co-op, IGA)
 - c. Small format stores (e.g. Extra Foods, Shop-Easy)
 - d. Department stores (e.g. Zellers, Wal-mart)
 - e. Convenience stores (e.g. Shopper's Drug Mart, 7-11, Mac's)
 - f. Small speciality stores (e.g. Steep Hill, Nutter's, Mom's Bulk Foods)
 - g. Farmer's markets or own garden
 - h. Dine in or Take out (e.g. restaurants, fast food outlets)
 - i. Community Programs (children's nutrition programs, good food box, friendship inn, food bank)

5. Does the distance to your grocery stores and food suppliers influence what you eat?
(For example, if you live quite far from a large store, you tend to purchase more convenience foods than you would like?)

6. Why do you choose the places that you get your food from? (For example, prices, location, easy to go out for supper if your tired, you like to support local famers)

7. Does your family use any of the following community programs?
 - a. Good Food Box
 - b. children's school nutrition programs
 - c. community gardening
 - d. baby food making workshops
 - e. Food Bank
 - f. Friendship Inn

8. Do your children's food wishes and preferences influence what you purchase?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. What kind of foods do you usually serve?
10. What kinds of foods would you love to serve?
11. Do you feel like you eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
12. What do you like about your current eating and cooking patterns?
13. What is your favourite and least favourite vegetable and fruit?

Appendix B. Second Questionnaire.

We will be contacting you next week to arrange meeting times. We hope to either meet you in person or by telephone.

Once again, thanks for your participation in this project. Please answer the questions that apply to you and your family.

This second questionnaire is focused around how you have accessing the Good Food Box, using the produce (including the newsletter), and any changes in your family's eating patterns. The last set of questions is around making links to food and housing.

1. What are your thoughts on ordering the Good Food Box?
2. Have you encountered any problems in getting your Good Food Boxes so far? – If so, what were they?
3. Have you been able to pre-order with your neighbourhood coordinator?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Could you suggest improvements on the Good Food Box ordering and receiving procedure?
5. Has the Good Food Box increased the quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables in your home?
6. Have you and your family eaten more fresh fruits and vegetables in the past couple of weeks? Any difference between parents and children?
7. Have you been able to use all of the contents in the Good Food Box? Did you send some in your children's lunches?
8. If you were not able to use all of the contents, what did you do with the rest?

9. Have you used the recipes in the Good Food Box's newsletter?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Have you shared any of the recipes?

10. What are your thoughts on the newsletter?

11. What have you and your family like about the Good Food Box so far? Any ideas for improvement?

12. What did you do with the spinach you got?

13. How do you see housing and food in relation to each other?

14. Since you have become a co-op member, have you seen any changes in your grocery purchases?

15. How are you involved in your community?

16. In our last questionnaire, people identified a need for a store in the core area. What needs would have to be met for you to buy there?

Appendix C. Focus Group Questions (with research participants).

Welcome to the Good Food Box “Meet and Greet.” We wanted to bring everyone together to have an informal discussion about the project and expand on the information you gave us in the questionnaires. Everything you discuss with us today will be confidential. That is, anything you say will not be connected with your name in any way. We want you to feel free to speak openly and honestly and know that the discussion will not be connected to you or used against you in any way. Also, please try to respect the confidentiality of what others say today. The information you share with us is important and will be useful for improving the Good Food Box program. This is a group discussion and the expectation is that we will treat each other with respect. Please try not to interrupt anyone or criticize what someone says. There is room for disagreement, every comment is important, and everyone’s opinion matters.

Question Area #1

One of the things we are interested in talking about is the way in which the Good Food Box is accessed. How accessible do you find it? Some people said in the second interview that they had problems with ordering and picking up. Did any of you experience that? What do you think about the ordering and receiving process? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for improving it?

Question Area #2

We’d like to know what you thought about the impact of the Good Food Box on your lives. That is, has the Good Food Box influenced what you and your family eat and how your family eats? Do you see a difference between how you ate before we started the project and now? What ways? Why/why not?

Appendix D. Third Questionnaire.

Thanks for your commitment to this project. We've learned a lot about how we can make the Good Food Box better for the core.

This questionnaire is focused around how we are achieving or falling short of the Good Food Box goals, how Quint and CHEP can work together, how the Good Food Box has influenced your family, and addressing support for you after the project is over.

Please answer all questions that apply to you and your family.

1. This project has been exploring the impact of two of the Good Food Box goals. These goals are, accessing healthy food and improving healthy eating habits.
 - a. How do you think we do on improving access to healthy food? Are we achieving this goal in the core? Is there any way that we could improve meeting this goal?

 - b. How do you think we do on improving healthy eating habits in your home? Is there any way that we could improve meeting this goal?

2. Has this project made it easier for you to get healthy, nutritious food into your household? How so or how not?

3. Has this project made a difference in your family's eating habits? How so or how not?

4. Are there any ways that you could see the Good Food Box and your housing co-op working together?

5. Both your housing co-op and the Good Food Box require time, energy, and a different way of getting food and buying a house than the conventional way. Do you think like there are any similarities between your commitment to your housing co-op and your commitment to the Good Food Box?

6. What have you liked about this project?

7. What haven't you liked about this project?

8. Some people have suggested that there should be more drop-off points for the Good Food Box in this area. Would you consider being a neighbourhood coordinator for a couple of co-op members after the project is over?

9. How could the Good Food Box encourage and support you to participate in our program after the project is over?

10. Do you think that you will continue ordering the Good Food Box after this project is over? Why or why not?

11. At the beginning of the project we told you that we wanted more people to become hooked on the Good Food Box. Are you hooked?

Appendix E. Key Stakeholders Meeting Questions.

Thanks for coming to this discussion today. We wanted to bring together people who have been involved with the Good Food Box programs in various ways to have an informal discussion about the Good Food Box and to learn from the unique perspective each of you brings to the program. We will be asking you several questions that we also asked our research participants in effort to expand on the information they have provided. Everything you discuss with us today will be confidential. That is, anything you say will not be connected with your name in any way. We want you to feel free to speak openly and honestly and know that the discussion will not be connected to you or used against you in any way. Also, please try to respect the confidentiality of what others say today. The information you share with us is important and will be useful for improving the Good Food Box program. This is a group discussion and the expectation is that we will treat each other with respect. Please try not to interrupt anyone or criticize what someone says. There is room for disagreement, every comment is important, and everyone's opinion matters.

1. This project has been exploring the impact of two of the Good Food Box goals. These goals are accessing healthy food and improving healthy eating habits.
 - a. How do you think we do on improving access to healthy food? Are we achieving this goal in the core neighbourhoods? Can you think of ways that we could improve on this area?

 - b. How do you think we do on improving healthy eating habits in your home? Can you think of ways that we could improve on achieving this goal?

2. What do you think about a co-operatively run grocery store within the core neighbourhoods?

3. How can the Good Food Box encourage and support people to participate in the Good Food Box program?

4. How accessible do you find the Good Food Box program? How do think others find it? Some of the research participants said that they had difficulties with ordering and picking up? What are your thoughts on this? Have you encountered problems with the process? With group members? Do you have any thoughts on improving it?

5. Please describe your involvement and experience with the Good Food Box program. Why are you involved? What keeps you volunteering?

Appendix F. Consent Form.

CHEP's good food box is essentially a large non-profit fresh fruits and vegetables bulk buying program. The good food box distributes between 100-1500 boxes each month to approximately 60 volunteer run neighbourhood drop-off points. The good food box has been operating for now for four years and CHEP wants to learn more about how they can make the good food box of interest to more families and about what families think of the good food box. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the Good Food Box in increasing access to affordable food and in promoting healthy eating.

By participating in this study, you will help CHEP learn more about the good food box program, you will receive some free and at half cost boxes of food, you will learn more about good food and food issues, have the opportunity to think about and discuss with others taking part your current and preferred eating and shopping habits, and increased accessibility to healthy food. Also, you will receive an invitation to a community eating celebration that will include good food and informal discussions.

The benefits for CHEP are to explore if two goals of the good food box - accessibility to good food and promoting healthy eating – can be achieved with current practice and if not what changes will be recommended by example from our project participants.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason. Your individual responses to surveys and questions will be coded so that no one but the researcher will know who said what. In all of the minutes of group discussions first names will only be used with the opportunity of using a name different than your own if you prefer that in the written record your first name be removed.

The project will consist of:

1. Four questionnaires over the phone and in person between January 2003 and July 2003.
2. Four "Regular" or "Small" good food boxes at no cost beginning on 12 February 2003, four half cost "Regular" or "Small" good food boxes beginning on 9 April 2003, and two full cost "Regular" or "Small" good food boxes beginning on 11 June 2003.
3. A food celebration with group discussions on the impact of the good food box.
4. A copy of the written report at the end of the study.

The study and the contents of this consent have been explained to me and I have received a copy of the consent. I agree to participate in the study as outlined. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant

CHEP Researcher

Print Name

Print Name

Date

Date

The researchers are listed below and may be contacted if you have any questions about the project.

Marilyn Brownlee xxx-xxxx
CHEP Sabbatical Researcher

Karen Archibald yyy-yyyy
CHEP Community Research Partner

Lou Hammond Ketilson
University of Saskatchewan
Faculty Support

Contact Information

The questionnaires will be coded to provide overall background information on the group of participants—your name will not appear on the final copy of the project

Contact Name: _____ Code # _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____