



TORONTO CANADA

Title of Practice

TORONTO: FOOD AS A TOOL FOR JOB CREATION AND INTEGRATION

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY



Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



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Context

Toronto, along with cities all over the world, faces numerous health, social and environmental problems related to food. Over the last half-century, there has been a global upsurge in the consumption of meat and processed foods rich in saturated fats, sugars and salts. Meanwhile there has been an **increase of international migrations** combined with the difficulty of guaranteeing jobs to the newcomers. As the federal government started to open the door to more immigrants to drive economic growth, some who were already in the country were also struggling to find jobs, despite being highly educated and qualified. The employment system both for Canadians and migrants became more insecure. For this reason, addressing **food systems safety** along with **job system security** became a key priority for Toronto municipal strategy and an issue that requires innovative and strategic solutions.

Overview of the food practice

Community Food Works (CFW) is a program for low-income residents that integrates food handler training and certification, nutrition education, and employment support through a **learner-centred approach** to food and employment skills development. Since 2014, Toronto Public Health (TPH) has delivered CFW in partnership with a wide range of community agencies and City Divisions in low-income neighbourhoods across Toronto. It is offered at no cost and supports people who experience barriers to employment and other economic hardships. The program builds the skills, knowledge and confidence for residents hoping to work in the food sector and/or start their own business, such as catering, and it also **reduces social isolation**.

Between November 2015 and January 2017, Toronto welcomed 6 199 Syrian refugees. As is the case for all newcomers, but particularly for refugees who have faced personal trauma, finding stable employment while adjusting to a new culture is extremely difficult. The influx of Arabic-speaking newcomers prompted TPH through the Toronto Food Strategy to create **Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement** (CFWN). CFWN adapts the curriculum and training process to **meet the unique needs of refugees and other newcomers** to Canada. This includes cultural tailoring of the food safety and food skills curriculum, translation, and the introduction of a peer-to-peer model of program implementation and interpretation. CFWN is currently being delivered in partnership with Toronto-based North York Harvest Food Bank, Flemingdon Community Health Centre and Working Women Community Centre with funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

Results and lessons learned

A preliminary evaluation for the first three pilot groups in 2016/2017 showed that of the 52 participants trained, 90 percent obtained their food handler certificates, 82 percent reported **increased knowledge in food skills and nutrition**, and 25 percent obtained employment after graduating, along with volunteer experience in the community. This included work placements in cafeterias, restaurants, community health centres, schools and in catering. The peer leaders bring organizational and leadership skills that enable them to support the participants according to their **cultural and linguistic needs**. In addition, this opportunity provides the peers with Canadian work experience and references, while helping to build their English language skills. Out of the six peer leaders who were initially trained, four found long-term employment. Over the next year, CFWN will continue to expand, working with new peer leaders and fostering new partnerships in areas of the City where newcomers are settling.

Community Food Works for Newcomer Settlement is an innovative approach to delivering core public health services through an integrated model. Using **food as a vehicle for refugee and immigrant settlement** and adaptation can support newcomers. Using food to bring people together in a supported environment can also break down social isolation, promote health, **build employment and incubate entrepreneurial potential**.



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