"The institution lets us exist, I would say, rather than wanting us to exist": Neoliberal influence on the experiences of post-secondary institution food support system operators

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

© Copyright by Holly Eckensweiler 2025

Sustainability Studies M.A. Graduate Program

April 2025

Abstract

"The institution lets us exist, I would say, rather than wanting us to exist": Neoliberal influence on the experiences of post-secondary institution food support system operators

Holly Eckensweiler

Research indicates that approximately one-third of post-secondary students experience food insecurity. However, there is limited research on engagement with those who organize alternative food support systems which seek to address post-secondary student food insecurity. Past studies on student food insecurity prioritize the experiences of those experiencing food insecurity, the barriers to food security and the consequences of food insecurity. Although important, research leaves out the voices of those who are attempting to support students. In this study, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how alternative food support services (AFSS) within Ontario post-secondary institutions seek to address student food insecurity through their programs. From six semi-structured interviews, I found that the most common barriers and facilitators to running the programs connect to key themes of neoliberalism. Specifically, responsibilization, institutional inaction (hands-off approach), and dependency on altruism/charity are evident in the experiences of program operators.

Keywords: Campus food systems, neoliberalism, student food insecurity, charity model, alternative food programs

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

AFSS   Alternative Food Support Systems

FI, FS   Food Insecurity, Food Security

SNAP   Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Chapter One | Introduction

Food insecurity (FI) across Canada has been on the rise, with its prevalence across the provinces rising from 15.9% in 2021 to 17.8% in 2022, the highest rate since food insecurity has been recorded (Li et al., 2023). The increase in FI is not only impacting the general public, but post-secondary students in particular, with studies finding about a third of this population to be experiencing food insecurity (Blundell et al., 2018; Olauson et al., 2018; Silverthorn., 2016). Food insecurity is defined by the Government of Canada as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Health Canada, 2020).

Studies have shown that students who are food insecure do not only experience physical problems, but many studies report that students who are food insecure also cite emotional distress, depression, and feelings of inadequacy (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021). The mental and physical toll that FI takes on students contributes to academic struggles, with studies illustrating the decrease in academic performance for students experiencing FI (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022; Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021). Factors such as financial issues, social economic status, lack of social support systems and social stigma all contribute to students' chances of experiencing FI (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Kansanga, M., 2022; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018; Waity et al., 2020).

One of the most common responses to FI is the reliance on emergency food programs (e.g., food banks). This method has been heavily criticized by some researchers specifically regarding the extended usage of short-term emergency food programs, their ineffectiveness in resolving food insecurity, and the alleviation of government responsibility for addressing the issue. Two researchers, Carson (2014) and Riches (2002), link an increase in food banks to the emergence of neoliberal ideologies and actions, showing how reductions in welfare

programs prompted community groups and the private sector to step in and compensate for the government's shortcomings. By moving away from state regulation and welfare, civil society is pushed towards relying on altruism, thus, leading to the overreliance on emergency food systems such as food banks (Clarke and Parsell, 2022).

Research on emergency food methods used to address FI such as food banks often involves investigating the experiences of those accessing programs, which is important for understanding users' perceptions of common FI relief methods. Research has also looked at the effectiveness of these programs in addressing FI. Findings have revealed that the experiences of food bank users vary, with some clients having positive experiences and others negative (Enns et al., 2020; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). However, many researchers have criticized the widespread usage of food banks, making the point that food banks were intended to be short-term solutions to FI that have become widely relied upon as long-term solutions that do not address the foundational causes of FI such as poverty, unaffordable housing, and limited social supports (Enns et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023; Middleton et al., 2018; Riches., 2002; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017).

Although the experiences of food insecure students and the effectiveness of food support programs on campuses have been studied, the literature is lacking with regards to *how* programs operate and what facilitates or impedes these operations. Some research on post-secondary institution food support systems has been done by Classens et al. (2022) and Classens and Sytsma (2020) but overall, there is an absence of research on operators, who are at the forefront of addressing student food insecurity. Student operators who participated in Classens et al.'s (2022) study identified how their positions as both students and food support providers allowed them to become advocates for student needs and bring forward issues of FI at the level of institutional administration.

This research seeks to address a knowledge gap by asking alternative food support system (AFSS) operators how their programs run and what impedes/facilitates the programs. This research will show how the struggles of AFSSs can be influenced by dominant neoliberal ideals and will specifically look at how the barriers operators experience are connected to the responsibilization of civil society. Understanding how neoliberalism shapes different aspects of charity and FI can help future AFSS operators understand common struggles of operating AFSSs. Additionally, this research may help AFSSs and their institutions to better address food insecurity on campuses. This in turn would help potentially mitigate some of the pains of FI for students and improve overall wellbeing.

Chapter two of this paper will be a literature review that begins with an overview of FI in Canada, its impacts, and common methods used to address it. Furthermore, it will illustrate the current prevalence of FI on post-secondary campuses and how students experience FI. The literature review also outlines the theoretical orientation of the thesis, where I explain the connection between neoliberalism and charity models.Following the literature review, Chapter three describes the methods used in this study to research the topic. The study used qualitative open-ended interviews to gain a deeper understanding of six AFSSs operators' experiences from six different Ontario post-secondary institutions. Questions pertain to funding, facilitators to program operations, and relationships with their affiliated institution and barriers. This chapter addresses how data was analysed and the ethics of the research.

Chapter four outlines the findings of the study by providing insight into what were the most common barriers/facilitators for the programs as well as their different types of funding. Excerpts from interviews are used to help readers conceptualize the experiences of the AFSS operators. Chapter five is the discussion where I outline how the barriers and facilitators brought up by AFSS operators can be connected to key themes of neoliberalism such as

responsibilization, institutional inaction and the reliance on charity/altruism. Chapter six concludes the paper by addressing strengths and limitations of this study, future recommendations and final thoughts.

Chapter Two | Literature Review:

What is food insecurity?

As defined by the Government of Canada, food insecurity is, "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Health Canada, 2020). Food insecurity is a fluid state where individuals may identify as being food insecure at some points in their lives but not all the time. In addition, Health Canada and PROOF[1] report on a range of severity levels (food secure, marginal, moderate, severe).

Various studies on food insecurity, with differing samples, have described food insecurity in similar ways and identify economic factors as its primary cause (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Kansanga, M., 2022; Payne-Sturges et al., 2018; Waity et al., 2020). Besides economic factors, physical limitations such as limited or no access to food support systems (food banks, pantries, community gardens, financial grants) lessen individuals' ability to mitigate their food insecurity (Bessey et al., 2020; Waity et al., 2020). In addition, social and personal factors contribute to individuals' food security status. These may include a lack of social support networks (Bessey et al., 2020; Waity et al., 2020). In addition, social stigma may stop people from accessing food support systems which could help alleviate food insecurity (Bessey et al., Waity et al., 2020).

Prevalence of Food Insecurity

In regard to the Canadian context, Statistics Canada reported that approximately 22.9% (or 8.7 million people) of the population experienced food insecurity in 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2024). PROOF's 2022 Household Food Insecurity in Canada report by Li

---

[1] PROOF is an interdisciplinary research program examining effective policy interventions to reduce household food insecurity in Canada: https://proof,utoronto.ca

et al. (2023) provides a detailed breakdown of Canadian food insecurity prevalence. Provincial differences in food insecurity levels and severity are outlined, as well as the prevalence of household food insecurity (HFI) in the territories (Li et al., 2023). Across the 10 provinces, it was found that 17.8% of households were impacted by food insecurity at some level (Li et al., 2023). Furthermore, the provinces with the highest levels of food insecurity were Newfoundland and Labrador (22.9%), New Brunswick (22.1%) and Alberta (21.9%) (Li et al., 2023). The report also provides some data on the territories but cautions readers about the reliability of the data due to data collection issues and small sample sizes (Li et al., 2023). Using the Canadian Income Survey from 2021 to determine the percent of individuals residing within food-insecure households (Li et al., 2023), Statistics Canada reported that, "46.1% of people in Nunavut, 22.2% of people in Northwest Territories, and 12.8% of people in Yukon lived in food insecure households in 2022" (Li et al., 2023, p.17).

Factors Associated with Food Insecurity

What are the main factors associated with increased food insecurity for almost one-quarter of the population? Food insecurity research has revealed the causes and consequences of individuals' food security status. For example, Pirrie et al. (2020) sought to research the link between poverty, food insecurity and poor health in ageing populations of Ontario, Canada and the factors that contributed to decreased food security and poorer health. Pirrie et al. (2020) employed a quantitative survey which assessed multiple factors such as self-reported health history, diabetes risk, and gender, age and socio-economic status. Results of their study showed that those who self-reported experiencing poverty were often food insecure as well (Pirrie et al., 2020).

Besides the Pirrie et al. (2020) study, numerous researchers have reported that economic factors, mainly income, have a tremendous impact on food security status.

In addressing who is the most vulnerable to food insecurity, Li et al. (2023), drawing on Canadian Income Survey data, reported similar factors as Pirrie et al. (2020) with financial insecurity being a major factor leading to food insecurity. Other factors associated with food insecurity include home ownership status, racial/cultural identity and Indigenous status (Li et al., 2023). Out of three home ownership types (i.e. renters, homeowners with mortgages and homeowner without mortgage), renters had the highest level of food insecurity (27.5%). Across race/cultural identity and Indigenous status, HFI was the highest among, "Black people at 39.2%, followed by Indigenous Peoples at 33.4% and Filipino people at 29.2%" (Li et al., 2023, p.28).

Post-Secondary Student Context

The research examined in detail in this thesis is focused on food insecurity in the post-secondary student population. In the following sections, the literature on this population is the focus.

Prevalence

Although available research on student food insecurity is limited, as many researchers in the field have identified, it is important to give context to what student food insecurity looks like (Blundell et al., 2018; Hattangadi et al., 2019, Olauson et al., 2018; Silverthorn, 2016). Silverthorn (2016) published a major paper that compiled data from five Canadian universities about rates of food insecurity and what segments of student populations were most heavily impacted. Silverthorn (2016) found that between those five universities, food insecurity rates ranged between 30-46%, with an average of 30.7%. Falling in line with Silverthorn's findings, Blundell et al. (2018) and Olauson et al. (2018) reported that 39.5% and 39.9% of post-secondary student participants at Memorial University of Newfoundland

(MUN) and the University of Saskatchewan (USASK) respectively experienced food insecurity.

Regarding the two studies, Olauson et al. (2018) evaluated food insecurity severity, student demographics and strategies used to cope with food insecurity. Using a random sampling design, quantitative surveys were emailed to approximately one fourth of the students attending the University of Saskatchewan and achieved a 30.2% response rate. Olauson et al. (2018) found that within the 12 months prior to the study, 39.5 % of students experienced food insecurity. Blundell et al. (2018) also sought to assess student food insecurity but through comparing food insecurity between different student groups studying at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The three groups they studied were international, Canadian out-of-province and home-province students (Blundell et al., 2018). The sample included 971 students (Blundell et al., 2018). Using the Health Canada and PROOF classification methods for rating severity of FI, Blundell et al. (2018) found that between 39.9% and 58.0% of students were food insecure in the past year. In comparison to home-province students, international students were 3.04 times more likely to experience food insecurity (Blundell et al., 2018). Although out-of-province students did not experience the same level of food insecurity as international students, they were 1.63 times more likely to be food insecure than home-province students (Blundell et al., 2018).

How Students Experience Food Insecurity

Although understanding its prevalence is important, much of the current research takes a qualitative approach to understanding experiences of student food insecurity. Articles published by Power et al. (2021), Bessey et al. (2020) and Hattangadi et al. (2019) provide critical insight into the ways in which students experience food insecurity while navigating post-secondary life. Power et al. (2021), Bessey et al. (2020) and Hattangadi et al. (2019)

conducted qualitative interviews to collect data on the connection between food insecurity and factors such as finances, perceived barriers, and mental health. Additionally, Abu and Oldewage-Theron (2022) evaluated 16 West Texas university students' experiences with food insecurity and documented students' suggested solutions to the issue.

In the study by Abu & Oldewage-Theron (2022), students were recruited from a larger study on nutrition and data was collected in two ways (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022). Data regarding demographics and food security status were measured through a questionnaire, and focus groups were used to discuss students' experiences and solutions. Similar to Abu and Oldewage-Theron, Bessey et al. (2020) looked at experiences of food security, but also policy solutions as well as perceived barriers and facilitators to food security. The sample consisted of university students in Nova Scotia and used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Hattangadi et al. (2019) used a mixed methods approach to study the relationship between food insecurity and mental health. However, the paper described here only reports on the findings of the qualitative in-depth interview component of the study focused on experiences of Ontario Institute of Technology students experiencing food insecurity. Lastly, Power et al. (2021) conducted interviews at Queen's University in Kingston Ontario to examine the relationship between student finances and food purchasing practices. Students included in the study were identified as, "students who didn't have enough money for food or who worried about having enough money for food" (Power, 2021: 49). Findings from each of these studies illustrate students' experiences with food insecurity.

Aligning with studies involving the general Canadian population, Power et al. (2021), Bessey et al. (2020) and Hattangadi et al. (2019) found that a lack of money was the most common barrier to food security reported by post-secondary participants. Students perceived that cost of tuition, rent, school supplies (e.g. textbooks) and having inadequate income to address these costs were barriers to purchasing healthy and nutritious food (Bessey et al.,

2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021). Lack of time for purchasing food, preparing and eating due to school responsibilities, extracurricular and jobs were all described as barriers to food security as well (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021).

Impacts of Food Insecurity on Students

Important findings on the impacts of food insecurity were reported in all these studies. Students conveyed that poor health, both physical and mental, was a recurring consequence of food insecurity (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021). Similar to findings involving the general Canadian population, students found that eating cheap food resulted in physical decline including fatigue and fluctuating weight (Bessey et al., 2020; Power et al., 2021). Mental health also suffered as students found themselves more easily frustrated, irritable, overwhelmed and generally unlike themselves, with these experiences typically occurring in tandem with feelings of failure (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022; Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021).

One key theme that has been both a consequence of food insecurity and barrier to seeking food support has been embarrassment. Individuals felt shame regarding their food insecurity status, linking it to their self-worth (Hattangadi et al., 2019). Participants held themselves back from accessing food support programs due to feelings of shame with accessing food support systems (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022; Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021).

Common Methods Employed to Address Food Insecurity

In regards to addressing food insecurity, one of the most common solutions at post-secondary institutions in Ontario is the use of emergency food systems (e.g. food banks or food pantries). In my own preliminary research in 2024, where I used Google to research

what food support programs were available at post-secondary institutions, I found that 11 out of 16 Ontario post-secondary institutions have food banks. Similarly, much of the research into "solutions" addressing food insecurity at post-secondary institutions uses food banks as the primary data collection site. Researchers have focused on how users of food banks/pantries experience using them and on users' perspectives on food banks. Some studies also seek to evaluate the effectiveness of food banks/pantries in combating food insecurity.

There have been many approaches to researching food banks. The following studies used different methods and sampling designs to research food banks. Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) endeavoured to use the lived experiences of Ontario food bank users as a tool to explore the usefulness and success of traditional charitable food bank models. Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) recruited participants by placing posters in food banks, and completed interviews with 13 Ontario participants, 11 of whom accessed a local food bank and 2 of whom did not use food banks but experienced food insecurity (Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews were used to ask questions about stereotypes, labels, perceptions, emotions and feelings related to accessing food banks (Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Similarly, Enns et al. (2020) sought to understand how food bank users experienced food insecurity, as well as how food bank usage impacted their lives. The study took place in Ottawa, Canada over a six-month period. Enns et al. (2020) relied on in-person recruitment, using the waiting areas of the 11 Ottawa area food banks to inform potential participants of the study. The sample included 29 food bank users at baseline and 20 at follow-up. Participants were asked questions about their experiences with food banks, their perceptions of food banks and life struggles (Enns et al., 2020).

Farahbakhsh et al. (2017) focused on the impacts of food insecurity on health and academic performance among recipients of support from their campus food bank. Farahbakhsh et al. (2017) employed posters, flyers and in-person recruitment at the campus

food bank, leading to a sample of 58 student-participants. While Enns et al. (2020) conducted

a longitudinal study with two data collection points, Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) and

Farahbakhsh et al. (2017) conducted single interviews with participants.

Although each study had different goals, there were overlapping themes across them

all. Participants in the Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) and Enns et al. (2020) studies labelled their

usage of food banks as a necessity and often felt forced to access such resources due to their

living situations. Inadequacy, shame and embarrassment were frequently cited by participants

in the Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) study, with a small number of participants citing similar

feelings in the Enns et al. (2020) study.

Among participants' perceptions, the theme of food quality/quantity arose. Although

participants expressed feeling appreciative of having access to food, they noted that supplies

from the food bank were often past their expiration dates and sometimes inedible (Enns et al.,

2020; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Participants from Smith-Carrier et al.'s (2017) study

observed that poor organization within the food bank led to inequitable distribution of food.

As an example, a participant in the Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) study spoke about how a

family received the same amount of food as a single person. The themes of lack of choice and

shame overlapped as users found themselves frustrated with having a lack of autonomy in

selecting their food. For example, Enns et al. (2020) collected data from numerous food

banks with different systems and included data from food banks that operated on non-choice

models. Non-choice models remove users' ability to select their food and have strict rules

such as "no trading" so that people often end up with items they may not be able/want to eat

(Enns et al., 2020; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017).

An interesting contrast was observed between the Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) and

Enns et al. (2020) studies. Both studies focus on very similar goals but have incredibly

different outcomes in terms of how food bank users perceive their experiences with food

banks. Participants in the Enns et al. (2020) study were generally positive when speaking about their food bank experiences; even when discussing problems with food banks, users noted that their existence was crucial to making food last till the end of the month. Participants in the Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) study also noted that food banks were essential but critiqued them as a short-term solution that has become a long-term solution. Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) outline that the foundational issues that lead to food insecurity cannot be solved with food banks since these do not address the financial causes of food insecurity.

Impact of Food Banks on FI Level

Farahbakhsh et al.'s (2017) distinctly different study goals led to alternative findings. While Farahbakhsh et al. (2017) also recruited food bank users, they focused less on their experiences with food banks and more on how their level of food security impacted these individuals. The study was cross-sectional with 58 University of Alberta students recruited though convenience sampling from the campus food bank (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Data was collected through a quantitative questionnaire which asked questions regarding general health and well-being, and the impact of food insecurity on academic performance and daily eating habits (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Consistent with findings from Hattangadi et al. 2019), Bessey et al. (2020) and Power et al. (2021), participants characterized as experiencing both severe and non-severe food insecurity reported an overall decrease in general health while experiencing food insecurity (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Poor health outcomes due to an inadequate diet, one lacking fresh food such as fruits and vegetables, were reported to not only impact the body but the mind as well (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Participants also reported academic performance impacts, with food-insecure participants citing difficulty with concentrating in class or during major assessments (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). The Farahbakhsh et al. (2017) findings align with those from past studies: food

insecurity hurts academic performance (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022; Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021; Waity et al., 2020).

The use of food banks has been criticized by some researchers who argue that they are not sufficient in addressing food insecurity. Numerous studies have characterized food banks as a short-term support for food insecurity that has turned into a long-term system that is often regarded as the first response (Enns et al., 2020; Middleton et al., 2018; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Similarly, Smith-Carrier et al. (2017) emphasize that because food banks rely on the charity model (a model which relies on altruistic methods of addressing social problems), they remove responsibility from structural bodies (such as governments) to create solutions which address the foundational causes of food insecurity such as poverty, unaffordable housing, and limited social supports.

Classens and Sytsma (2020) note that the provision of food banks on campuses is insufficient and that institutions should focus on establishing programs that teach critical food literacy. Classens and Sytsma (2020) define critical food literacy as,

> "a set of skills, knowledge, and understandings that (1) equip individuals to plan, manage, prepare, and eat food that is healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainable, while (2) enabling them to understand the broader sociopolitical and ecological dynamics of the food system, and (3) empowering them to incite socioecological change within the food system." (p. 10).

In general, there has been a move towards creating food support systems that move away from charity models. Some studies described below explore the use of community gardens, subsidized markets and other campus food initiatives as a way to broaden access to food and address food insecurity (Nazmi et al., 2023; Classens et al., 2022).

Financial Interventions

One study conducted by Nazmi et al. (2023), investigated the effectiveness of financial interventions, specifically a government supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), on student food insecurity. Although not based in Canada, the data collected from this study is nonetheless significant to discussions concerning the impact of financial interventions on student food insecurity. Situated in California, the study followed students from a large California university who applied to Calfresh, California's version of SNAP (Nazmi et al., 2023). The examination period lasted 6 months, with students being surveyed at the beginning of the study, with 3-month and 6-month follow-ups (Nazmi et al., 2023). The researchers had two sets of samples, students enrolled in Calfresh and those not enrolled in Calfresh[2] (Nazmi et al., 2023). Although both groups experienced an improvement in perceived food security levels, SNAP-enrolled participants' improvement is attributed to their participation in SNAP (Nazmi et al., 2023). SNAP participants reported a significant reduction in food insecurity, with food insecurity dropping more than 40 percent over 6 months (Nazmi et al., 2023). While non-SNAP participants also experienced a small reduction in food insecurity over the study period, the changes in their levels are believed to be connected to the non-SNAP free food resources they would have been referred to when they attended the on-campus session to learn about the Calfresh/SNAP program (Nazmi et al., 2023).

Research on Post-Secondary Campuses

Although much of existing research does not highlight the efforts or experiences of those running food support systems on post-secondary campuses, a study conducted by Classens et al. (2022) does provide insight into campus food systems alternatives. Classens et al. (2022) wanted to understand the role of Canadian campus food systems alternatives

---

[2] Those a part of the 2nd group were individuals who went to a session to learn about Calfresh but were either ineligible or did not complete their applications therefore never received SNAP.

(CFSAs) in the transformation of food systems. Classens et al. (2022) characterize the concept of CFSAs as an umbrella term capturing both campus food growing spaces (CFGS) and campus food serving space (CFSS) as alternative food systems that are distinct from conventional campus food systems. In their research, Classens et al. (2022) collected information about how these programs run and the experiences of those who interact with them.

From interviews with 49 students and staff affiliated with CFSAs, Classens et al. (2022) determined that in regards to how CFSAs are run and structured, there are commonalities across funding for different CFSA models. More often than not CFSAs receive funding through levy fees or money from student administrations (Classens et al., 2022). In addition, donations and fundraising are crucial to CFSAs (Classens et al., 2022). Less commonly, CFSAs receive direct funding from their post-secondary institutions, such as from the main food services budget (Classens et al, 2022). Differences in funding (sources and amounts) among CFSAs can mean differences in financial stability (Classens et al., 2022). Programs that are reliant on, "very small funding sources and volunteer labor" (p.163), may struggle in comparison to programs that receive more stable funding or direct financial support from their institutions (Classens et al., 2022).

In outlining the differences between traditional campus food systems and CFSAs, Classens et al. (2022) argue that the significant student participation and leadership within CFSAs helps centre and advocate for student concerns. In their study, two student leaders emphasized the disconnect between student run and traditional food systems on campus, pointing to how the latter may not take student food needs and issues into account (Classens et al., 2022). CFSAs may be used to bridge the gap between student food needs and food provision by traditional campus food systems.

In considering the transformational potential of CFSAs, Classens et al. (2022) discovered some of the barriers and facilitators to running programs. However, besides their study, program organizers' experiences have been largely unstudied, which leaves gaps in the literature. The present study seeks to understand how food support services operate within Ontario post-secondary institutions, as well as how operators seek to address student food insecurity through their programs. A part of this study includes uncovering the key barriers and facilitators to the operation of these programs.

Theoretical Orientation

As mentioned above, charity programs rely on the altruism or charity of individuals or small groups to address food insecurity (Poppendieck, 1998). Though altruism is not intrinsically a negative thing nor is charity, the reliance on a charity model of support is not unproblematic. However, in order to better understand charity models and their impact, we must understand what neoliberalism is and how the removal of responsibility from government bodies in charity models aligns with a key principle of neoliberalism.

What is Neoliberalism?

Under neoliberalism, market practices, ideas and systems which shape the economic sphere are applied to spheres of society that were traditionally not economic in nature (Becker et al., 2021; Bettache et al., 2020; Swales et al., 2019). Social life and all its accompanying aspects are influenced by neoliberal ideals, promoting free-market principles that push individuals to be recognized primarily as consumers and workers (Bettache et al., 2020; Swales et al., 2019). These principles shape personal success and failure as a natural function of society, with success being the reward for those deemed as hard workers and

failure as being one's fault (e.g. from a lack of hard work) (Swales et al., 2019).

Neoliberalism promotes competition between people, with the goals of economic

development and growth, increased personal autonomy, and overall freedom from

government control (Becker et al., 2021; Swales et al., 2019). Further, neoliberal ideals

maintain that every hard-working person who participates in the market, no matter what their

background is, will have an equal opportunity to flourish (Bettache et al., 2020).

These ideas of competition and personal development are explained as natural under

neoliberalism and are also used to justify the inequalities that arise from it. McGuigan (2014)

notes that neoliberalism rationalizes inequalities among people as natural and that "losers" –

those suffering under neoliberalism – are essential in motivating the majority to work harder.

Moreover, failures are seen as a personal consequence of individuals' actions, separate from

the effects of outside influences such as social, political or economic factors (McGuigan,

2014). This reasoning is the basis of McGuigan's concept of "compulsory individualism",

which constructs the individual as capable, free, benefiting from neoliberalism and, most

importantly of all, responsible for consequences that stem are attributed to their own actions

and inaction (McGuigan, 2014). This responsibilization of the individual helps deflect

attention from structural inequalities created by neoliberalism that perpetuate poverty,

injustice, and discrimination (Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017).

Neoliberalism cannot simply be understood as an ideology that impacts certain

aspects of society such as the economy; the values and ideals of neoliberalism have spread

throughout the social sphere to solidify its place as the dominant political discourse (Fine &

Saad-Filho, 2017). Numerous scholars have uncovered how neoliberalism plays a pivotal role

in different social and economic issues such as the food insecurity of students. Studies

conducted with students and the general population have had similar findings, with

participants citing feelings of shame, embarrassment, a sense of failure and guilt when

accessing food banks or talking about their food insecurity (Abu & Oldewage-Theron, 2022; Bettache et al., 2020; Bessey et a., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021; Swales et al., 2019). Through a neoliberal lens, individuals' personal struggles with food insecurity are seen as just that, personal. Food insecurity is not viewed as a broad structural issue but as a micro-level problem that stems from one's own choices and (in)actions.

The Intersection between Neoliberalism and Charity Models

Neoliberal discourse impacts not only how members of society understand food insecurity but also the way it is addressed. Authors researching the topic have argued that under neoliberal discourse, food insecurity is depoliticized and socially constructed as an individual failing rather than a structural issue (Carson, 2014; Raine et al., 2003; Riches, 2002; Smith-Carrier, 2020). Carson (2014) and Riches (2002) tie the rise of food banks with the rise of neoliberal discourse and practices, illustrating how cutbacks to welfare programs led community organizations and the private sector to fill in the gaps for the government. Clarke and Parsell (2022) further detail this shift.

Clarke and Parsell (2022) sought to understand the changing relationship between the resurgence of charity, the deconstruction of welfare practices and the rise of neoliberalism. They posited that the shift in responsibility for welfare from state bodies to altruistic citizens and organizations has enabled the state to withdraw significantly from directly supporting welfare (Clarke & Parsell, 2022). Similar to how social issues are constructed as an individual problem, under neoliberalism citizens are constructed as a source of untapped labour and compassionate energy that is stifled by the intervention of the welfare state (Clarke & Parsell, 2022). Community and unpaid labour is essential under neoliberalism as it allows the state to rely on the community's collective action to address social problems while it remains distant and not responsible for further intervention (Clarke & Parsell, 2022). The

weakening of social services and reduced fiscal social welfare support has led to a dependency on charity organizations (Carson, 2014; Riches, 2002). The resurgence of charity has led to the reliance on emergency food solutions to handle food poverty, which the sociologist and author Janet Poppendieck (1998) takes an in-depth look at in her book *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement.*

In Clarke and Parsell's (2022) article, the connection between neoliberalism and charity is laid bare, while Poppendieck (1998) illustrates not only the many social and institutional benefits of emergency food programs, but also their failure to solve the problem of food insecurity. She drew upon seven years of research in which she visited different US emergency food operations (e.g. food banks, soup kitchens, food rescue programs) and interviewed numerous emergency food stakeholders (e.g. emergency food operators, clients, government officials).

Critiques of Emergency Food Provision

On the basis of her research, Poppendieck developed seven key issues with emergency food which she termed as the Seven Deadly "Ins". They are as follows:

- Lack of food. Often these programs are insufficiently stocked to handle clients' needs;
- Cannot address everybody's preferences. The food provided through emergency food systems is not appropriate for everyone they serve;
- Quality issues. Emergency food programs often do not provide nutritionally adequate food;
- Emergency food programs are unstable. Reliance on food donations and food rescue impact food supply, while the precarious financial support and volunteer labour create additional instabilities;
- Emergency food is often inaccessible as the programs pop up, not necessarily in places where food poverty is prevalent, but in places where supply (labour and workers) is available;

- Emergency food is often inefficient. There is so much infrastructure required for emergency food systems to operate; and

- Receiving charity (emergency food) comes at a social cost. There is a level of indignity in receiving emergency food support.

These critiques laid out by Poppendieck (1998) point out some of the critical areas of concern with emergency food provision. However, it is important to note that since the publication of her book, Poppendieck's stance towards emergency food provision has evolved. More recently, Poppendieck (2022) published an article criticizing the exclusive nature of food justice movements, while promoting a more inclusive relationship between food justice[3] activists and anti-hunger advocates. Poppendieck (2022) illustrates that major proponents of food justice movements often argue that only alliances with progressive-radical food groups can lead to change. This position is brought about by the belief that reformist food groups simply reproduce and help perpetuate corporate food regimes (Poppendieck, 2022). Poppendieck (2022) illuminates the historical importance of reformist food groups. She points out that reformists, in addition to mitigating suffering in the here and now, have had a significant impact on transforming food assistance programs through action and advocacy (Poppendieck, 2022). While not minimizing the impact food reformists have had on forwarding food assistance, Poppendieck (2022) notes that in order to move towards food justice, the US cannot just rely on food assistance. Poppendieck (2022) concludes the article by emphasizing the importance of a collaborative relationship between food reform and progressive-radical food systems. The differences in Poppendieck's writing shows a shift in her mentality towards emergency food. In *Sweet Charity* emergency food is criticized heavily

---

[3] Food Justice movements are multifaceted taking two approaches, "The first, the 'humanistic' approach – referring to humans being placed front and centre – was reflected in ten definitions and was underpinned by the social justice principles of dignity, self-determination, equity, access, fairness and greater participation. The second 'more-than-human' approach was reflected in two definitions and combined social and environmental justice principles to include issues of distribution, participation and procedure, recognition and capabilities." (Murray et al., 2023, p. 730).

while in more recent writing she is saying that food justice movements need to include emergency food in the transformation of food systems.

Issues with Charity Models of Support

Shaming and Blaming

Although contributions to charity may be rooted in the desire to help, the reliance on altruism has negative impacts. Smith-Carrier (2020), Raine et al. (2003), Riches (2002) and Carson (2014) perceive food charity as a band-aid solution to addressing food insecurity. Riches (2002) and Smith-Carrier (2020) added that food banks do not address the root causes of food insecurity such as poverty and material deprivation. The research goals of these authors were significantly different, yet they all found that a dominant discourse under charity models is the concept of individualization. Carson (2014) assessed the impact of food banks on the perceptions and conceptualization of food relief at the community and individual levels. Carson (2014) analysed documents supplied by the Olive Brand Food Bank, covering the period of 1989 to 2008, including promotional documents, meeting minutes, and food bank correspondence. Analysis revealed that the most common discourse was the individualization of food insecurity (Carson, 2014). In promotional material used by the Olive Branch Food Bank, language implying fault was used to talk about supporting food bank users and words such as "lifestyle" implied that individuals had a choice in their precarity (Carson, 2014). The representation of users as blameworthy (for their food insecurity) does not recognize structural inequalities such as inaccessible housing, job precarity, and unequal power relations (Carson, 2014). Similar sentiments were reported in Raine et al.'s (2003) study. Raine et al. (2003) focused on childhood hunger and investigated whether charitable school- and community-based nutrition programs actually succeeded in lowering children's food insecurity. In their findings, it was revealed that program volunteers

were subscribing to the discourse of individualization. However, blame was not being placed on children; it was being placed on the parents (Raine et al., 2003).

Across every program included in the study, Raine et al. (2003) discovered that program volunteers held negative assumptions about the parents of children using the program. Volunteers and organizers held the belief that students' food insecurity was a result of their parents' neglect, further solidifying the individualization of food insecurity (Raine et al., 2003). This kind of blaming, as described in Carson (2014) and Raine et al (2003) is not an uncommon theme in charity models of social support. Riches (2002) detailed the history of food banks in Canada and evaluated their effectiveness in addressing food insecurity, noting that the stigma and shame associated with food banks often are a barrier to accessing them. Riches (2002) reiterates that a part of being food secure means having the ability to access food in a socially acceptable way. However, the social stigma associated with food banks constructs them as being a socially unacceptable way to procure food. The concept of indignity presented by Poppendieck (1998) is evident in the findings presented above.

Precarity

While not discussing food charity, Baines et al. (2014) provide an interesting reflection on precarity in charity work, specifically how it impacts non-profit services. Baines et al. (2014) situate precarity as a phenomenon that leads to program operations or structures being unpredictable and insecure. In the case of non-profit organizations, precarity can come in different forms such as short-term employment contracts, inconsistent funds and a reliance on inconsistent volunteer labour (Baines et al., 2014). To further investigate precarity in the non-profit sector, Baines et al. (2014) pulled information from literature surrounding non-profit agencies, as well as data from a qualitative study conducted with Toronto-based non-profit employees and the *Shaping the Future* survey, a survey of non-profit organizations

23

during 2013. These resources allowed the authors to situate precarity within non-profit work. They found that several themes emerged from the data (Baines et al., 2014).

Heightened stress due to job insecurity and lack of stability was a commonly cited issue, with burnout being immediately associated with the constraints of working in non-profit work where low-pay, insufficient resources and loss of organizational autonomy are frequent issues (Baines et al., 2014). Additionally, employees recognized that as a result of their precarious work, they often found themselves searching for jobs that could provide more security and predictability (Baines et al., 2014). Operations managers talked about the excessive accountability that comes with having to justify to funders the services provided and the success of them, which often included extra work or work that took employees away from providing services (Baines et al., 2014).

Much like most charity work, work within the non-profit sector is constructed as a "labour of love" perpetuating the view that people commit to it because of altruism and the satisfaction of helping others (Baines et al., 2014). The imposition of institutionalized business-like approaches strains providers' ability to work with care (Baines et al., 2014). The shift towards market-based approaches includes changes in program designs and funding which force non-profits to rely on volunteer labour (Baines et al., 2014). Baines et al. (2014) found that unpaid labour was not being done by just volunteers but also by paid employees in the form of unpaid overtime. In another example of precarity, there was a lack of union protection for many non-profits (Baines et al., 2014). Lastly cutbacks in funding and ability to provide different services such as coverage for public transit fees and free childcare to those accessing the program had negative repercussions for the community members accessing the programs (Baines et al., 2014). The work by Baines et al. (2014) illustrates how precarity, a main feature of charity work, impacts providers' ability to operate non-profit food-provisioning programs and clients' experiences with them.

Conclusion

This literature review provides context surrounding the issue of food insecurity and specifically looks at how Ontario post-secondary students experience food insecurity. Additionally, the literature review considers how charity models, the dominant response to food insecurity on campuses and the general public, are promoted through neoliberal practices as well as negatively impacted by them. Much of the research conducted on solutions to food insecurity focus on the experiences of those using the programs, with few studies looking at the experiences of program operators. In the current study, I seek to examine the experiences of the operators of alternative food support systems (AFSSs), the barriers and facilitators to the functioning of their programs and how the relationship between post-secondary institutions (institutions) and AFSSs' impacts their operations. Furthermore, I seek to understand how the core themes of neoliberalism and the charity model of food provision are reflected in the struggles and successes of Ontario post-secondary institution food support programs.

Chapter Three | Methods

Research Goal

As described in the literature review above, there is limited research focusing on post-secondary alternative food support systems (AFSSs) in general and even less research on program operators and the daily operations of their programs. The goal of the current study was to give program operators a voice and to provide insight into how AFSSs support students and operate within their institutions. Moreover, determining what challenges these programs confront and how different types of programs address these challenges could provide significant information to others attempting to set up or operate similar programs on their campuses.

In this study I first established what was considered an alternative food support system (AFSS). For an AFSS to be included in the study, it must have a primary objective oriented to addressing post-secondary student food accessibility and insecurity and be a non-corporate food service in a post-secondary setting. For example, if a program has a goal to use locally sourced food or focuses on sustainability but does not look at addressing food insecurity or food access, then it would not be included. There is a myriad of different alternative AFSS types ranging from food hampers to campus gardens. Only AFSSs operating on Ontario post-secondary campuses were considered for this study.

In seeking to address the current gaps in the literature, I focused on learning how alternative food support systems operate and function on post-secondary campuses. Additionally, I sought to understand the relationship between AFSSs and the institutions they are affiliated with. This was done through a qualitative approach, using interviews which were guided by a semi-structured interview guide. Questions focused on the history of participants' respective programs, the daily operations, funding, staffing, and common barriers and facilitators to running the program and to addressing food insecurity among

students at participants' respective institutions (See Appendix A - Interview Guide). The goal

of these questions was to allow individuals to provide insight into their jobs as program

operators by allowing participants to give detailed responses. In the first interview, I noted

interesting points that I believed were important to my research, such as comments about

support from participants' affiliated institutions. Following the first interview, in each

subsequent interview, I made notes about the similarities and differences with the previous

ones.

Recruitment and Sampling

Once I determined that a program met my criteria, I reached out to individuals

involved with operating and organizing post-secondary food support systems at selected

campuses, including program directors, coordinators, staff, and volunteers. Participants were

recruited through non-probability purposive sampling, as I selected programs and participants

I found to be most relevant to my research and having interesting programs (Babbie et al.,

2021).

During the exploratory phase, I sought to establish who was in charge of running or

organizing the different food support programs affiliated with several post-secondary

institutions in Ontario. I collected contact information online and used it to email potential

participants to explain the study to them, outline why they were being contacted, and what

the study entails (See Appendix B - Invitation Email). Those who showed interest in the

study were sent the information and consent form and an interview was set up (See Appendix

C- Information and Consent Form). At the beginning of each interview, I walked through the

information and consent form with participants. This was how I confirmed their willingness

to participate and establish verbal consent from participants who had not filled out the digital

version of the form. Some participants had already filled out the form prior to the interview,

thus, written consent forms were obtained in those cases. Following the review of the

information and consent form, participants completed a single interview with the researcher (H.E).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place over Zoom as participants were located across Ontario. Between early August 2024 to late October 2024, I conducted six online interviews. Before starting the interviews, I sought participants' permission to audio record the interviews. All interviewees consented to being recorded and interviews were recorded through Google Recorder. Interviews lasted 40 minutes to an hour depending on the participant's engagement. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, but I blacked out any disclosed personal or identifying information. Initially, seven AFSS operators indicated interest in participating in the study. I completed interviews with six of the operators and received written responses[4] to the interview guide from one who, because of time constraints, was unable to schedule a meeting via Zoom.

I organized my interview data in a Word document and used the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis platform (https://atlasti.com) to help organize the analysis. Data from the interviews was analyzed through a thematic approach to identify commonalities and differences across food support systems using an inductive approach to identify emerging themes and patterns from the data collected (Babbie et al., 2021). As this study is not focused on testing a theory or hypothesis, the use of inductive analysis is appropriate, as I looked for emerging patterns and themes including how AFSSs address food insecurity and the facilitators and barriers to running these programs. Data was categorized in two ways, one based on the interview guide: for example, responses to the same question were analyzed against each other so I could document the range of responses given. The second way is

---

[4] This participant's written responses lacked both depth and detail and were therefore not included in the study analysis.

through the cross-case analysis which may reveal overarching themes in the data. The goal of analyzing data this way is to see if there are any patterns related to individual questions and responses.

Ethics Procedures

I obtained approval from the Trent University Research Ethics Board on July 31st of 2024 after submitting my proposal (Protocol #29087). Throughout the entire process, I have taken the appropriate steps to follow the principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on how to conduct research ethically with humans. All participants provided their consent to participate.

Social and professional risks were mitigated in the following ways: a) participants were reminded that they should only speak to what they are comfortable sharing; and b) participants were reminded that neither their identity nor their organization will be revealed, and they can speak freely about their opinions and experiences with their program (See Appendix C Information & Consent Form). The open-ended nature of the questions ensures that participants can control what they wish to speak about. There was no direct benefit for participants, but they may have indirectly benefited from participating in my study as they provided to the field of student food insecurity and contributed to a greater understanding of how AFSSs can help address student food insecurity and challenges encountered in their operation. Following interviews, I transcribed the recordings and while transcribing the interviews, participants' names and identifying information were removed from the data. Furthermore, the names of participants' programs were excluded from the presentation of the findings and instead were identified by their program type and institution demographics (e.g., food bank, garden, etc.).

Chapter Four | Findings

Participant information

A total of six alternative food support system (AFSS) operators participated in the interviews (Table 1). The study consisted of two food gardens, two food hamper programs, one food center and one subsidized food market. Participants' organizations were affiliated with six Ontario universities. The two food hamper programs had similar operations where program staff and volunteers put together food baskets (hampers) which were distributed to clients of the program. The food center acts as a food insecurity relief program which offers different food supports such as an emergency grocery pick up, a fruit and vegetable food hamper at a subsidized cost ($5) and cooking classes. The subsidized food market is a program where community members (students, staff and faculty) can buy pre-packaged meals that are priced using a 'pay what you can' model. Four of the programs are connected to large institutions (>15,000 students) and two are connected to medium sized institutions (5,000 – 15,000 students). All of the programs are located in urban centers[5].

Table 1
Alternative Food Support Program Operator Profiles

Pseudonym	Type	Size of Institution	Rural or Urban
Fern	Garden	Large	Urban
Oak	Subsidized Food Market	Large	Urban
Birch	Food Hamper	Large	Urban
Pine	Garden	Medium	Urban
Spruce	Food Hamper	Large	Urban
Cedar	Food Centre	Medium	Urban

---

[5] Statistics Canada's (2022) definition for urban and rural areas was used to categorize the different cities. Urban areas are defined as an area that has 1000 people or more and a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre. Rural areas were areas that did not meet these requirements.

The frequency of participant responses to key questions posed in interviews is summarized in Table 2, below. More in-depth consideration of participants' responses follows.

Participant Responses

Table 2
Summary of AFSS Operator Responses

Interview Questions	Yes	No	No information given
Were you a part of the beginning of the program?	2	4	0
Were there barriers to starting the program?	1	2	3
Are there currently any barriers to running the program?	6	0	0
Does your institution provide any other supports besides financial?	4	2	0
Does your institution provide media support or advertisement?	5*	3*	0
Has your institution been vocal about student food insecurity?	4	2	0

*Two participants said both yes and no. See below for further elaboration.

Few program operators were present for the founding of their programs with only two operators being a part of the process. However, three participants were able to speak to whether there were barriers to starting the program, as an additional operator had a close relationship with the founder of the program and was able to speak to their program start-up. Two of these participants noted that barriers did occur when starting up the program, whereas a third participant noted receiving no resistances or barriers to implementing the program. Pine noted that when the program was started, it met few barriers even stating that it was "...surprisingly easy." Pine further elaborated that the founder of the program simply asked to start the program and the institution agreed.

All participants cited experiencing barriers to the day-to-day operations of their programs. Four of the participants stated that their institutions provided support outside of funding and two participants said that they did not receive support from the institution at all. With regards to media attention and advertising, five participants stated their institutions advertised their programs and one participant said their program is not promoted by the institution at all. It is worth mentioning that two of the five participants who claimed

receiving media support qualified their answers. The first operator noted that the institution newsletter would share some of their posts but not posts that asked for donations, which a majority of their funding comes from. Pine noted that smaller sections (departments) of the institution would share some of their posts but the institution at large has not and there were even situations where the institution would use pictures of their garden as promotional material but not credit the program. Operators were also asked whether their institution publicly acknowledged student food insecurity. Four operators said yes and two said no.

Funding was broken down into three categories; funding from levy fees (fees that are charged by the college or university to students each semester in order to support student programs), funding from student efforts/student associations such as student run fundraisers and undergraduate associations, and funding through personal efforts (e.g., applying to grants, fundraising). Three of the participants noted their programs received funds through levy fees. Two of the participants indicated their program received funding from student associations, such as graduate or undergraduate associations. It is important to note that these two programs do not receive direct funding from levy fees. Both program operators, Spruce and Cedar, clarified that the associations they collaborate with allocate funding to their programs. Spruce summarizes the process:

> So when students pay their fees, there is a section that goes towards the student association, so from that there is funds allocated to us that we use for our marketing budgets that we use to run events which then in return, help us get more donations.

Lastly, four participants illustrated that some of their funding comes from their personal efforts, such as applying to grants or running fundraisers. Operators did not indicate whether

these personal funding efforts were a formal part of their role in the organization or extra

unpaid labour. Although it was not clarified during the interviews, from the language used by

Pine and Cedar, the external grant writing they do is done as a necessity to financially support

their programs. Pine brought up the fact that she does grant writing to support staff wages and

that most of the funding is external. Cedar commented, "*We just didn't have enough funds to*

kind of continue some of our programs, so we really need to apply to outside grants." Pine

commented on the fact that although the institution allows the garden to receive levy fees, it

does not provide any other financial support, *"...any money from the institution is directly*

from students, the institution itself is not giving us a dime." These sentiments were also

reflected in Birch's response to the question regarding funding, stating, "*Our only budget is*

coming from the levies, which is like coming from the students themselves." Although not a

question included in the interview guide, from participants' responses it was evident that none

of the program operators received direct financial support from their institutions.

       The following two sections will discuss what factors acted as facilitators and barriers

to program operation according to interviews with program operators. It should be stated that

some or all of the issues or supports campus programs experience can be impacted by the

institution. So, although this paper makes the distinction between institutional and other

factors, there may be overlap between categories.

What Facilitates Program Operations

Category Definitions

       Five categories of responses regarding what facilitates the operation of AFSSs

emerged from the data. These categories were (1) financial support, (2) institutional support,

(3) access to space, (4) student/volunteer support and (5) collaboration with the community

(See Table 3). Participants' responses were categorized as financial support when they

discussed funding or money having a positive impact on the program. An example of funding being important to running the program comes from Pine:

> So, the biggest supporter of smooth transition is levy fees for sure, like having that reliable source of income is really the thing that allows us to continue to produce food reliably because we have to be purchasing seeds in December for the following growing season. So having that reliable source of income is really important for our success.

Other institutional support revolved around non-monetary assistance received from the affiliated institution. This support could be collaboration, social media support, and/or access to location. Fern found that the institution supplied volunteers to the garden due to the fact it is often used for educational purposes. Access to space as a support was mainly about operators having access to indoor and outdoor space to run their program. Student/volunteer support is defined as any type of support provided by students/volunteers such as working for the program. Lastly, collaboration with the community is defined as any collaboration with other groups or individuals. Community collaboration included receiving administrative assistance from partner programs, running workshops and could include receiving financial/material donations.

Table 3
Facilitators of AFSS Operations

Factor Categories	Yes	No
Financial support	6	0
Institutional support	3	3
Access to space	3	3
Student/volunteer support	6	0
Collaboration with community	6	0

All of the operators cited financial support, student/volunteer support and collaboration with the broader community as factors that assist the operation of their programs. These three factors were frequently mentioned by participants throughout interviews and often with participants circling back to each factor's importance in bolstering the quality of service provided by the program. As demonstrated in the quote by Pine, the importance of reliable income cannot be overstated. Funding was identified as being essential to buying supplies needed to create food relief packages and gardening resources among other things. Cedar noted that external grants were helpful in covering funds for staffing costs. However, not all funding is the same. Cedar pointed out that many grants have requirements for how grants are used and often do not include staffing costs, thus, cannot be used at the discretion of the program.

Similarly, volunteer efforts were essential to running the programs. Student support was often the first facilitator cited by operators to running their programs. Fern stated, "*Well, I have a great team of students that work with me throughout the season. I couldn't do without their help.*" These sentiments were also reflected in Spruce's comment on volunteer support, "*I would say with facilitation of smooth running is our volunteers. We wouldn't be able to survive without them, that's what I would say.*" Volunteers were more often than not students, with only Spruce noting that members of the institution's administration and professors had shown interest in volunteering at their program.

A significant percentage of collaboration efforts occurred between the AFSS programs and other programs with similar goals. Fern talked about the collaboration with the food banks located on campus and how the garden's surplus is donated to them. Besides donating surplus to the campus food bank, it was normal for Fern to bring vegetables to the campus food market to provide students with fresh vegetables at lowered prices. Spruce's food hamper program frequently collaborates with the city food bank. When bringing up the

city food bank, Spruce spoke about it with confidence and appreciation. Spruce added, "...*the city food bank is a key player,"* to the success of the program. As for administrative support, Pine and Birch illustrated that they received financial management (bookkeeping, financial advising) help from established student groups. Both operators found this essential as neither program had the financial capacity to hire a financial advisor.

Three operators claimed that their institution provided support. This support took the shape of levy funding and different forms of collaboration. Spruce, Oak and Fern all found that collaboration with their institution contributed to their success. Oak explicitly stated that the program would not have been able to operate without the approval of senior leadership (institutional approval), "*It was certainly supported by the institution, like it had to have been approved through our senior leadership*". Spruce and Fern noted that advertising was also a form of support from their institutions. When asked about whether his institution provided support outside of financial support, Fern noted, *"...the university will share stuff [social media posts and events] that we do periodically.*" However, it is important to note that Fern did add the caveat that the garden is a major focal point of the institution, "*I mean, for what we're doing and for how much is invested in us like this, we're a real big marketing flag. Like its like, 'look at the cool things happening with smiling faces and colorful things*.'" Spruce reported similar findings, noting that his institution not only provided media attention but also donations, "*So the institution significantly support us with first of all donations [boxes of canned food donations], the second is the marketing aspect of it, right*".

Three operators found that access to space was impactful to running their programs. Interestingly two of these operators work for the gardens. With regards to the garden programs, having access to space to grow crops and store equipment was essential. It can be difficult to procure space that is large enough to accommodate the program's needs and accessible, which was evident in Fern's and Pine's discussions. Fern found that the location

of the garden space was great for local foot traffic, however, it lacked some amenities like electricity which the program had to address itself by installing solar array (a group of solar panels). Pine outlines the different spaces they use to run the program:

> We're lucky to have the space. They (the institution) also allow us access to the greenhouse for starting seedlings and we have a storage closet for bringing stuff out of like the snow and in the field in the winter and we can bring it and store it inside.

Having the space to run the program and store tools and equipment improves the quality and capacity of the program. The one non-garden operator, Spruce, said that having the space to run the food hamper and not having to pay rent to the institution helped minimize costs.

It is important to note that the remaining three program operators indicated they did not receive support or received little support from their institutions and in instances felt as though their institutions did not care about them.

Program Barriers

Category Definitions

The barriers that operators brought up were similar to the factors that help run their programs. As shown in Table 4, the categories for barriers were (1) financial barriers, (2) collaboration barriers, (3) employee barriers, (4) institutional barriers and (5) physical barriers. In this section, I describe each type of barrier and provide examples of them.

Financial barriers are defined as barriers revolving around financial issues such as lack of funding, precarious funding, and struggles obtaining funds. Cedar provided a simple

example of a financial barrier, "*Yeah, so I would say just overall running programs, there's a lot of issues with like just funding in general.*"

Collaboration barriers are barriers that involve issues around lack of communication with surrounding organizations (e.g., affiliated institutions, student associations and institution staff), reluctant collaboration from affiliated institutions, or issues caused by reliance on other programs. Fern talked about how difficult it is to find the right support from the institution, "*The issue sometimes is not, can I get support? But who do I need to ask, you know, that narrow support at an institution.*" Fern has the ability to collaborate with the institution in positive ways but has trouble finding who to talk to. Fern's comment starkly contrasts with Pine's relationship with their institution, "*The institution itself, I wouldn't say offers a ton in the way of supports, like the institution lets us exist, I would say rather than like wanting us to exist.*" Both are examples of barriers to collaboration but reflect different relationships with their institutions. The excerpt from Pine reflects their experience of an institutional barrier as it relates to how the inaction of institutions or direct actions of the institution act as a barrier to running the program. Birch's interactions with their affiliated institution have impeded the operation of their food hamper program:

> Yeah and not only the certificate (A certification that would allow them to
> handle and provide perishable foods), like we don't have the location for it.
> We don't have a place for it [Talking about not having the ability to store
> fresh foods], it's very hard to rent space on campus and then (when) we asked
> the institution they said that, you know, "(The undergraduate association) has
> already has this big food bank area, why you guys are not collaborating," you
> know, like the institution also doesn't want to have two different food banks.

At a different point in the interview, Birch noted that, "*The institution doesn't support us in any way, okay? There is no support. Like nothing at all*." It is important to note that although many of the instances of participants' responses reflect active institutional barriers, participants also described situations where the institution's inaction caused struggles for the programs. Institutional struggles also included instances where the institution's actions more directly impede a program, such as creating plans that would impact the program but not including them in discussions. Pine faced issues with development on the lands the program is located on (which will be further elaborated in the barriers section).

Employee barriers included being short staffed, reliance on precarious volunteer efforts, and employee availability. Some participants noted that they struggled to run their respective programs due to being the only full-time employee. When talking about running the program's social media site, Fern stated:

It sucks [chuckling]. As the jack of all trades, I have to update the website and that's just like, you know, on that winter list that yeah. Basically (it) falls down the list and again [talking about updating the social media site], I'm the only employee full-time in the program, I will say.

Physical barriers include instances where the physical location was impacted by construction, resource problems (e.g., lack of access to water, internet, power), and storage issues. When talking about the inability to obtain a perishable food certificate, Birch stated that the certification is not just a barrier by itself, but that their space is in fact a barrier. The location that the food hamper operates out of does not have the amenities to support storing and processing perishable food, thus impeding the distribution of fresh foods in hampers.

In the section below, I provide in-depth descriptions of the kinds of barriers participants shared, as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4 Barriers to AFSS Operations

Factor Categories	Yes	No
Collaboration barriers	5	1
Institutional barriers	3	3
Employee barriers	4	2
Financial barriers	4	2
Physical barriers	5	1

Five of the participants cited collaboration as a barrier but it is important to make the distinction that two of the operators were not claiming they lacked collaboration (as is the case with the other three operators) but that their collaboration was problematic. The first operator, Fern, found that collaboration is a barrier because it is hard to figure out who to talk to within the institution to get help with specific concerns. Fern used an analogy of finding a ladder on campus to explain. He stated, *"Now if I need a ladder, if someone has one, I'm sure they'd be happy to lend me it, but I don't always know who do have ladders I could ask to borrow from.".* It is not an absence of support but navigating and finding where that support is within the institution. The other operator, Spruce, noted that due to their program's collaboration with and reliance on donations from the city food bank, if the city food bank is low on donations, then so are they.

In regards to the three other operators, lack of collaboration was a barrier to their program operations. For example, Birch found that their food hamper program struggles were often due to their inability to receive donations from the city food bank. Birch conveyed that the issue lies in the city bank's long-term relationship with the undergraduate food bank at their institution, claiming, *"...because we have an undergraduate food bank, the (city) food bank is donating to them for years and they said that they can only donate to one, you know, food bank.*" In the past the undergraduate food bank and the food hamper program worked together. At that time the food hamper paid the undergraduate food bank to provide food to

graduate students. However, the cost of this collaboration was no longer feasible for the hamper program. However, as seen in the comment made above by Birch, the food hamper program was being pressured to collaborate/rely on the undergraduate food bank once again. Birch found this counterproductive as it would lead to the same problem which led them to separate. Birch noted that collaborating once again would allow them to provide perishable foods in their hampers. However, the price to collaborate is too high for their budget as previously stated.

Some issues with collaboration also overlap with institutional barriers. Half of the participants cited institutional barriers. Unsurprisingly, these are the same operators who did not cite institutional support. In addition to the example provided by Birch's collaboration issues with the undergraduate food bank, there were other issues caused by the institution. One of the factors playing into the decision to potentially collaborate again was the fact that the location being used for the food hamper program did not have the utilities to store fresh foods, which Birch added was due to the limited renting space on campus. Instead of providing solutions to location problems, the institution questioned Birch on why the food hamper program was not collaborating with the undergraduate food bank. Birch believed the institution's attitude towards them was because the institution viewed them as additional paperwork, that, *"...having two different associations, that they didn't want that in the first place.*" The inaction of the institution has stifled the progress and independence of Birch's food hamper program.

Pine had had different issues with their affiliated institution, specifically issues regarding land usage and development. In discussing the establishment of the program, Pine emphasized the ease the founder had starting the program, however, Pine also added:

I think the barriers started showing up more than anything like 10 years ago

was when it started to, we've started seeing all the red tape and the pushback

and now "(the institution) don't want to sign contracts" and now we have, you know, conflict.

Although the institution was not actively pushing back against the program or taking actions to hinder the program, by not establishing a contract with the program to protect the land they use, there is an underlying threat of displacement. As institutions grow, there is an increase in demand for developing surrounding land. A lack of existing contracts makes gardens vulnerable to being uprooted which is an issue that Pine is currently experiencing. In the past, the program faced loss of land because of development, which program operators did not know about until far into the planning stages. Pine addressed this lack of communication:

> The institution is scared of ruffling feathers until they have a for-sure plan.
> But what that means for us is that we're not included in the conversation of
> the planning process because they're scared of like making us unhappy and
> getting negative pushback, but it means that I'm so out of the loop, all of the
> time [said in a tired tone].

If there was some continuous communication between the program and the institution, scenarios such as these might be avoided, however, in Pine's case it is evident that the institution continues to exclude the AFSS. Pine said that new development is supposed to occur soon, but they did not hear it from the institution but from a colleague concerned about the impact of the development on the program. Instances of institutions disregarding the opinion or autonomy of AFSS program providers show the lack of care for programs attempting to address food insecurity and scarcity.

On the topic of institutional inaction, Cedar, who operated a food centre, spoke extensively about the unwillingness on the part of the institution to move away from

42

charitable/emergency food support. When Cedar spoke with the institution about receiving funds from non-charitable efforts (funds other than donations and grants), they were denied:

> They denied it, they were like "no we'll just ask for more money through like a charitable approach." So the institution itself still sees food insecurity as being addressed through like charitable measures and it just kind of being a food bank. Like I don't think they really understand the difference or they're not really able or willing to move beyond addressing food insecurity.

Cedar's experience shows the institution's unwillingness to move beyond short term solutions to food insecurity on campus. As someone who is invested in policy change that addresses the root cause of food insecurity, that is poverty, Cedar takes the stance that high tuition exacerbates food insecurity. Cedar adds that policy change could be significant but that the institution would not see it that way:

> That's where you would see a lot of pushback. So, I would say, like the student union is more open to the different ways to address food insecurity and that it's a symptom of poverty, like they understand that, whereas the institution would like to just stick to those emergency-based responses and not even kind of bring awareness to the fact that it's a structural issue. That it's an issue with the tuition rates. It's an issue with the inability to access food on our campus. They kind of, like, push that away.

Post-secondary institutional inaction and action both have impacts on AFSSs as is evident from the operator's experiences.

Four of the participants cited employee barriers. It is interesting that volunteer support was cited by all operators as being important to running the program, but what is evident is that the reliance on volunteer efforts is sometimes problematic. Oak noted that volunteers had to be trained in specific ways to volunteer at the food market. This included being trained to follow specific scripts for talking to clients. The amount of time and effort invested into training is lost when the volunteers do not show up for a shift, which was something that seemed from Oak to be a common occurrence. Moreover, due to the reliance on volunteers, the program cannot run 7 days a week or even a full day sometimes, as Oak states, *"...I think there's just simply not enough volunteers for that or ability for that at this time* [referring to operating full-time]." Further, because volunteers are mostly students, the program does not operate during exam season. Oak did not mention it, but this time is often the most difficult time for students to lose access to a subsidized food market due to the stress of exams and diminished personal funds.

The other operators took issue with being the only full-time staff member, as anything and everything becomes part of their responsibility. Operators such as Pine outline their duties, often having to be a jack of all trades. As Pine puts it:

> The only full-time employee that we have, for most of the year is me and that
> means that my job is planning the garden, managing the garden, managing
> staff, doing all the strategic planning, reporting back to different committees,
> managing all the conversations that happened with admin, basically,
> everything in an organization that HR, you know, accountants and like
> everything that can happen is falling under my purview, social media,
> communications and it means that I never can really do anything to the best
> of the ability that's possible.

The quality of work being done is impacted by the lack of full-time employees. What was also concerning was that even the centrally funded programs that receive levy fees cannot afford more staff. Additionally, volunteer labour can be inconsistent as Birch points out, "*When we first started this program, we had so many volunteers but in time they, you know, [drifted off] like we have only one or two really committed volunteers now.*"

Four operators found that financial factors impeded their program. Of the four operators, two received funding centrally, which is funding that is consistent and guaranteed, yet still insufficient to make program operators feel financially secure in their programs. Cedar commented about financial barriers in general, "*Yeah, so I would say just overall running programs, there's a lot of issues with like just funding in general.*" A comment made by Birch summarizing the barriers they experience running the program ended with, *"...and of course budget, you know*?" Both comments summarize the experiences of the four program operators.

Lastly, all but one participant cited some kind of physical barrier to operating their programs. Spruce was the one operator who did not cite physical barriers and was very content with the set-up they had with the institution. The other five operators experienced some distinct issues, although there were commonalities as well. Fern noted that due to an increase in students, extra parking lots were being put in (not on their garden space) which meant that service vehicles were in the way of them accessing their site. Fern, however, did not view this as an institutional issue as they were happy with the improvement in the parking lot. Other physical barriers that Fern brought up were issues related to utilities. Fern uses the garden to do demonstrations, and the lack of bathrooms can put a damper on the presentation. Pine also talked about the program being hampered by the size:

I would say another barrier, is that we like could potentially produce more

food if we had more land available, but we're definitely boxed in on the land

that we have and I'm happy with the land that we have but the institution has

made it very clear that there is no opportunity for expansion where we

currently are.

In addition to utilities, scarcity of food/lack of resources were considered physical barriers. Oak found that because they participate in food rescue, there are times when they run out of food:

So we're at our most recent monthly meeting. We were told they are

running out by like 12:30 so between 11 and 12:30, they have food and

after 12:30 or 1, then out of food.

Inadequate location amenities were also problematic for some programs. As briefly mentioned, when talking about the struggles, Birch cited experiences with rental space as a physical barrier. The facilities the food hamper program was using did not have the amenities needed to store fresh foods like fruits and vegetables, which cuts down on what they were able to provide in the food hampers. Much like the other categories, the presence of physical barriers varied across the AFSS discussed, negatively impacting some programs in substantial ways.

Chapter Five | Discussion

Introduction

This research contributes information about the experiences of a few alternative food support services (AFSS) operators and what it is like to run their programs at post-secondary institutions. This study, although not representative of all post-secondary AFSS operators, uncovers some of the barriers and facilitators operators face when running their programs. Embedded in the experiences and accounts outlined in Chapter 4, the findings reflect key elements of neoliberal discourse and practices. The most pervasive elements were responsibilization, institutional inaction (hands off approach), and dependency on altruism/charity. Similar issues were identified by Poppendieck (1998) and Clarke and Parsell (2014) in their respective works. In this chapter, I consider these barriers and facilitators by returning to literature that looked at neoliberalism discourse and practice, the rise of charity work and the convergence of the two on the conventional methods used to address food insecurity. The last theme will identify how AFSS programs examined in my research work to subvert traditional neoliberal actions on the part of the post-secondary institutions in which they are located.

Although much of the literature review focused on emergency food systems (e.g. food banks, food pantries), this study did include food support systems such as gardens which are not considered emergency food programs. Community gardens often take a proactive approach, trying to prevent food insecurity in comparison to emergency food systems which are more reactive, responding to food insecurity. No matter the difference in how the garden programs functioned in comparison to the emergency food programs, they were still susceptible to many if not all of the barriers emergency food operators cited.

It is also important to reflect on the fact that despite differences in focus and activities between the emergency/non-emergency food programs, issues such as responsibilization and

institutional inaction have worryingly similar effects on the programs. Moreover, both types of AFSS often relied significantly on charity. The discussion below delves into more detail about the instances where these themes were present and their impact.

Theme 1: Responsibilization

As discussed in the theoretical section of the literature review, neoliberalism has led to the pervasiveness of responsibilization which McGuigan (2014) and Sakellariou and Rotarou (2017) identified as an essential element of neoliberalism that helps remove state responsibility for addressing social and economic issues and re-positions responsibility onto the shoulders of civil society. We can see that same kind of responsibilization by post-secondary institutions. From AFSS operators' accounts, responsibilization impacted how they ran their programs and at times acted as a barrier to running their programs effectively. In this thesis, I make the argument that responsibilization and precarity go hand in hand. Instability in AFSS operations creates problems that become the responsibility of program operators. Below, I outline some instances where precarity and instability led to operators shouldering extra responsibilities.

There were times when operators had to do work outside of their formal responsibilities in order to help the program. This was especially evident when they were discussing funding. Most of the operators pointed out that they had to source either additional or external funding (e.g., grant funding, donations, run fundraisers) for the programs. Calling back to Pine's and Cedar's statements, both operators had to resort to grant writing and fundraising to address funding needs for staff wages. Interestingly, the fact that Pine's program does receive levy fees but still cannot afford to pay staff using that money connects to the fact that even central funding for programs can be insufficient. These examples fall in line with the finding of Baines et al. (2014) that program operators often shoulder the burden of extra duties which can take away from the operator's ability to effectively run their

48

program (Baines et al., 2014). Additionally, one participant from my study illustrated an issue that participants in the Baines et al. (2014) study brought up. Recall that Cedar identified grants as a source of support but added the caveat that grants often have rules surrounding usage and often are not allowed to be used for staffing costs. In Cedar's case, the lack of flexibility in funding became a barrier which is what Baines et al. (2014) also found in their study. Calling back to Classens et al. (2014)'s point, it is evident that the variety of funding does impact the stability of the programs. Moreover, Poppendieck's (1998) point about instability due to precarious funding is present.

Operators' experiences with responsibilization does not stop at funding. It could be argued that funding is the starting point for many if not most of the programs' issues (e.g. employee barriers, AFSS daily operations). In situations where program operators are either the only full-time staff or one of a few, they struggled with handling so many aspects of their programs. Although Baines et al. (2014) frame excessive accountability in a way that talks about having to do extra managerial work on top of regular work, the idea relates to responsibilization as operators are expected to complete the work of multiple people due to a lack of full-time employees. Both operators of the gardens found that due to their positions as the only full-time employees, their attention was often divided between operating the program and maintaining it. As Fern said, due to his position as the only full-time employee, some tasks do not get completed, e.g., updating the garden website. In fact, when I first contacted Fern, I was not sure the program was still running because the last update on the website had been from 2022, two years prior to the interview. Pine noted that on top of running the garden itself (e.g. planning the garden, managing part-time staff and volunteers), all strategic planning, human resources work, finances, social media and communication falls to her which she felt impacted the tasks and did not allow her to do the best of her ability.

Although not operating emergency food programs or charity operations, both garden operators described problems that demonstrate neoliberal responsibilization.

Another point of contention is the issue of contractual agreements that protect the space being used for AFSSs. The lack of a binding agreement adds another level of instability and precarity to the program as there is essentially nothing legally protecting the program from displacement. This situation almost occurred for Pine's garden program. The lack of security for Pine's program and the institution's change of plans for the space led to Pine being burdened with the responsibility to manage to the changes being made.

Another one of the themes presented by Baines et al. (2014), the idea of charity work as a labour of love, was present in one of Birch's comments. Birch shared that after the resignation of one of the food hamper coordinators, Birch took on those extra responsibilities even though it was not in her job description. Birch's action reflects those of the participants in the Baines et al. (2014) study where paid employees participated in unpaid labour. The idea is that operators will fill in where needed. This can be viewed as a form of responsibilization where people's altruism and care for one another is co-opted and exploited.

Institutional Inaction and Responsibilization

In addition to actions taken by the institution that overtly impact AFSSs, the inaction of post-secondary institutions can also contribute to responsibilization for program operators. Failure to support these programs can contribute to their instability by forcing them to rely on programs that often face the same kind of instability. As Poppendieck (1998) notes when explaining the issues with emergency food, the reliance on charity (e.g. food donations, monetary donations, volunteer labour) or other charitable organizations adds another level of precarity these programs face.

For Birch this is a very real experience. Birch experienced an institutional collaboration barrier. The food hamper program was not able to receive donations from the city food bank and the undergraduate food bank was not willing to partner with the food hamper program for an affordable price. What made it an institutional barrier was the institution's unwillingness to step in and address the issues occurring between the two programs. The institution's response put the onus on Birch to rely on another charity program, again reflecting the responsibilization of program operators. All of the responsibility to address the problem (e.g. the inability to receive donations from the city food bank and the inability to provide perishable food options) falls on Birch's shoulders.

The situation harkens back to the effects of instability, such as the inappropriateness, and quality issues that arise from being an emergency food program (Poppendieck, 1998). Birch's experience is important, not only because it highlights how institutional inaction can lead to the responsibilization of issues for program operators, but it also points to the impacts that limitations of AFSS programs can have on the students who rely on them – although this was not the focus of the present study.

Similarly, when Cedar reached out to her institution seeking funding through non-charitable efforts, the request was denied. The situation between Cedar and the institution is an explicit example of an institution denying an AFSS program financial support and ensuring the program's reliance on charity for funding. The precarity that comes from not having an established supportive relationship with the institution and, the absence of support and a lack of stable funding can lead to the reliance on charity and altruism.

Theme 2: Dependency on Altruism and Charity

An increased dependency on altruism and charity efforts to address social problems as Clarke and Parsell (2022) discuss stems from the rise of neoliberalism. Due to the hands-off approach of the state, there was a shift towards individual non-state actors taking up the

mantle to address social inequalities and issues (Clarke & Parsell, 2022). Emergency food operations often rely on the unpaid labour of volunteers, which is evident in the findings of the study. All operators noted the importance of volunteer support for the functioning of their programs. As I pointed out in the literature review, altruism is rooted in compassion and generosity but the over reliance on it can result in compassion-fatigue – which is evident in participants' accounts. Additionally, volunteer labour is an unreliable source of labour as it often comes second to volunteers' obligations to their personal, academic, professional and family duties. Volunteer labour is only an option when people have extra time to commit and, with increased forms of responsibilization and instability in civil society, that labour becomes increasingly unstable.

Among Poppendieck's (1998) seven deadly "Ins" of emergency food operations, the characteristics of low quality, limited quantity, inappropriateness and instability were present in the AFSSs. It is important to note that there is some overlap between the characteristics of instability and quality and quantity. This is due in part to the fact that program instability can impact programs' ability to have stable food systems.

Although Birch's struggle with their institution and undergraduate food bank has been discussed thoroughly, it is also an example of food quality concerns in emergency food programs. The combination of not being able to receive a perishable food certificate and the inability to receive donations from the city food bank means that the food hamper was not always able to provide graduate students with the food they need. This connects to the inappropriateness of food provision through emergency food systems. Remember that the food hamper separated from the undergraduate food bank because of financial issues, but by separating, the food hamper cannot provide perishable foods which has been a point of contention for graduate students. There is a tension between providing students with food that they may not want and not providing students any food at all because the program could not

afford to pay the undergraduate food bank. This brings up an interesting point that administrative issues can get in the way of addressing the needs/wants of students. These programs take up the responsibility of feeding students but because they are inadequately supported the services are negatively impacted and they are then also criticized for providing inadequate food.

Quantity issues were problems for both food hamper programs as well as the subsidized meal program. In the case of the food hampers, both had some kind of relationship with their city food bank but to differing degrees. Where Birch's food hamper had a negative relationship with the city food bank, Spruce's food hamper had a strong relationship with the city food bank that could be relied upon. However, the reliance on one charity organization to supplement the needs of another charity program illustrates a critical issue: if the city food bank is low on donations, then so would be Spruce's food hamper program. While this point can be considered a quantity problem, it goes beyond quantity to true instability as one precarious program relies on another.

Similarly, in the subsidized meal program, Oak noted that there have been numerous occasions where the program runs out of food a few hours after opening. The subsidized meal program relies on food rescue to provide meals. In order to increase the number of meals available for purchase, food program staff need to obtain and re-purpose rescued food. The program's reliance on food rescue means the subsidized meal program is an unreliable source of food.

Instability is at the heart of many of these programs. From financial issues to food shortages, much like Poppendieck (1998) claims in her book, these programs are unstable as they have to rely on donations, precarious funding and volunteer support. While volunteers were recognized as being impactful to running the different programs, there is a level of precarity that comes from unpaid volunteer labour (Baines et al., 2014). As many of the

operators pointed out, volunteer support is often a cycle with different people coming in and out of the program all the time. There are times where there is a plethora of volunteers and there are downtimes. Birch makes the point that when their program first started there was a significant amount of volunteer support but over time volunteer availability waned, leaving behind only a few committed individuals. The other operators did describe difficulties sourcing volunteers, but they had different problems. Most operators noted that their volunteers were primarily post-secondary students. This fact holds importance as students are volunteering their time on top of completing their studies. This means that when students are experiencing busy periods, the likelihood they will not be able to volunteer increases and statements from Oak reflect this. Remember that Oak stressed that the program is not able to operate 7 days a week or even full days. Oak adds that this is due to people not showing up for shifts particularly around exam season. The instability of the program means that students who are experiencing food insecurity cannot rely on the program to mitigate their insecurity.

Lastly, a smaller but nonetheless important point that came up from both Fern and Pine was that they both had significant volunteer pools but still experienced constraints running their programs because volunteers could not handle certain responsibilities like garden tours and administrative responsibilities (e.g. reporting to different committees, human resources responsibilities and handling finances). This brings forward the point that volunteers can only do so much.

Theme 3: The Impact of Institutional Engagement

The absence of institutional intervention, as Bettache et al. (2020) illustrate, is pivotal to perpetuating the neoliberal idea that individuals are responsible for their own successes and failures. Neoliberal ideology posits that the intervention of the state takes away from people's autonomy. However, this ideology of individual responsibility allows the state to shift responsibility for major structural inequalities (e.g. poverty, gender inequalities, etc.)

onto the shoulders of citizens (Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017). In many cases this leaves individuals to struggle on their own. For AFSS operators such as Pine, Birch and Cedar, the lack of relationship with and presence of the institution in running the program caused problems for the operation of their programs. Alternatively, there were two programs that appeared to receive more institutional support overall in comparison to the other programs. Fern and Spruce's programs were successes as their positive relationships with their affiliated institutions provided them with benefits that other programs did not receive. That is, both programs received significant attention such as advertisement through their institutions and extra funding opportunities (e.g. funding from fundraisers and donations), which both operators identified as being impactful to gaining volunteers.

The institutions' actions towards these programs are a good first step as it shows that support from an affiliated institution can bolster the stability of the program. However, the institutions' collaborations with AFSS programs should not end at advertising or establishing levy funds because my research shows that these supports do not work toward ensuring sustained strategies to reduce and eliminate student food insecurity on campus.

Chapter Six | Conclusion

Final Thoughts

Food insecurity is a widespread issue which impacts people all across Canada and post-secondary students are not exempt from this experience. Studies have shown that many of the factors that influence the general population's food security levels also influence students' food security. Financial issues (tuition costs, rent, food prices, inadequate to no income), physical restrictions to accessing food security programs and social factors (lack of time for cooking/purchasing groceries, school) all have been shown to impact student food security (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021). Food insecurity does not just impact physical health but also mental health (Bessey et al., 2020; Hattangadi et al., 2019; Power et al., 2021).

In attempts to address food insecurity, emergency food systems and charity models have been widely used across Canada and we see this pattern in the food support systems available on post-secondary campuses. Although these emergency food systems can be a good first step towards transforming our food systems as Poppendieck (2022) notes, critics have established that food banks specifically, are being used as long-term solutions to food insecurity but are not equipped to solve it (Enns et al., 2020; Middleton et al., 2018; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). These critiques characterize food-banks as short term relief programs that are not able to address the foundational concerns of food insecurity (e.g. poverty) (Enns et al., 2020; Middleton et al., 2018; Smith-Carrier et al., 2017). Even though food banks are commonly used on post-secondary campuses, along with a few other types of food support systems, there is limited research surrounding them. Work from Classens et al. (2022) and Classens and Sytsma (2020) have explored the issue, but it still largely remains unstudied. Even less research has been done on the experiences of program operators and their interactions with their institutions.

This research sought to uncover how alternative food support systems (AFSS) operators experienced their programs, what acts as facilitators and barriers to running such a program and their interactions with their post-secondary institutions. Despite the small sample size, the results of this study are important for understanding how food support systems operate within Ontario post-secondary institutions. On the surface, this research adds to existing understandings of what impacts the functioning and capabilities of these programs. Under the surface, however, it is clear that AFSSs, similar to food programs in communities more generally, are not safe from the impacts of neoliberalism. More than 20 years after the publication of her book, Poppendieck's (1998) original seven deadly "Ins" for emergency food programs are still present in the current day struggles of AFSS operators. The quality, quantity, and appropriateness of food supplies were noted as problematic, and AFSS financial and functional instability were present. What is more concerning is that the non-emergency food programs experienced many of the same issues. Even with insights provided by a small sample of AFSS operators, these findings fall in line with past research from Classens et al. (2022), Baines et al. (2014) and Poppendieck (1998). The reliance on volunteer labour and unstable funding adds to the instability of these programs (Baines et al., 2014; Classens et al., 2022; Poppendieck, 1998). The precarity of these programs leads to an inherent instability which not only impacts how the program is run but also how well they can provide for students.

Strengths

This research contributes information about the experiences of a few alternative food support services operators and what it is like to run their programs at post-secondary institutions. This study, although not representative of all post-secondary AFSS operators, uncovers some of the barriers and facilitators operators face when running their programs. Embedded in the experiences and accounts outlined in Chapter 4, the findings reflect key

elements of neoliberal discourse and practices. The most pervasive elements were responsibilization, institutional inaction (hands off approach), and dependency on altruism/charity. This study presents the findings from six operators and while small, the sample provided insight into post-secondary food support systems, adding to a lacking body of literature. Furthermore, this research could assist AFSSs and their institutions in more effectively addressing campus food insecurity, potentially alleviating some of the hardships associated with FI for students and enhancing their overall wellbeing.

Limitations

The limited sample of AFSSs and restriction of those that were recruited to those with an online presence is a limitation in this study. Some programs did not have an online presence (e.g. program email, phone number, generally any information about who to contact about the program) which made it difficult to reach out to a broader range of potential participants. During the recruitment process the researcher emailed 13 different program operators with initially eight responding and only seven responding to follow-up emails that contained more information about the study. It is possible that AFSS operators had little ability to participate in interviews because they are scrambling to keep their programs afloat because they have limited finances or other resources such as paid or volunteer staff during the school year. This is partly supported as one operator noted they were not available to complete an interview due to schedule conflicts but could answer the interview guide questions on their own time. The information from that operator was not included in the study as many of their responses lacked the depth or details needed to answer the questions fully.

Recommendations

Based on my findings, several solutions are evident that would bolster the impact and stability of AFSS programs located in post-secondary institutions. As for most complex

problems, there is no one solution. In order to improve the running of AFSSs, changes should be made by both the institutions the programs are affiliated with and the programs themselves.

It is recommended that institutions be more active and present in AFSSs rather than taking a hands-off-approach. As was evident in Fern's and Spruce's programs, a strong collaborative relationship between an AFSS and the institution can have positive impacts on the facilitation of the program. Relationships between the institutions and the AFSSs were strong when there was open and active communication and where AFSS operators were included in conversations that impact the program.

Programs having poor or weak relationships with the institution to which they are attached are negatively impacted as seen in the struggles described by Pine and Birch. By subscribing to neoliberal discourse and action, the affiliated institutions of their programs either did not help address the problems their programs faced or contributed to those problems. The experiences of these four AFSS operators illustrate the importance of strong institutional supports, with the experiences of Pine and Fern demonstrating how a symbiotic relationship between institution and program can benefit both parties. The programs benefit from not having to actively advocate and protect their programs from the (in)action of their institutions, issues that Pine and Birch had to deal with. Institutions also benefit from the positive affiliation and effects of having these programs on their campuses.

Moreover, institutions could better address the issue of student food insecurity by working with the student body to figure out solutions to the problem. As noted previously, in post-secondary alternative food support services, a large majority of volunteer labour is made up of students, many of whom have insight or perspective on the issue of student food insecurity. AFSSs are a site where student advocates and leaders could bring forward student concerns that traditional food systems do not address (Classens et al., 2022).

As for current and future AFSS operators, there are a few recommendations for them. One of the main concerns for all operators in the study was funding, thus, working towards establishing a stable source of funding can contribute to the success of the program. This may be done through levy fees, however, operators need to be hesitant about relying solely on levy fees as previous operator experiences have shown that they sometimes do not cover the costs of the program. Moreover, AFSS operators, especially garden AFSSs, should work towards gaining a contract to protect the land/space the program is using.

Future research should seek to use multiple recruitment methods such as phone calls and in-person study endorsement in addition to emails. Further, data collection may benefit from taking place during the summer or later months of the school year when program operators are potentially less busy. This may help with improving the sample size. Another aspect of the study that could be explored further concerns the fact that, although the two gardens are not considered emergency food programs, they both experienced similar barriers and facilitators to running their programs as the emergency food programs. Future research could investigate why non-emergency food programs experience the same struggles as emergency food programs.

References

Abu, Tavarez, S., & Oldewage-Theron, W. (2022). University Students Suggest Solutions to Campus Food Insecurity: A Mixed Methods Study. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print),* 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2022.2055437

Babbie, E., Edgerton, J.D., & Roberts, L.W. (2021). *Fundamentals of Social Research, 5th Canadian Edition.* Nelson/Cengage Canada.

Baines, D., Cunningham, I., Campey, J., & Shields, J. (2014). Not Profiting from Precarity: The Work of Nonprofit Service Delivery and the Creation of Precasiousness. *Just Labour*. https://doi.org/10.25071/1705-1436.6

Becker, J.C., Hartwich, L., & Haslam, A.S. (2021). Neoliberalism can reduce well-being by promoting a sense of social disconnection, competition, and loneliness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 60*, 947-965. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12438

Bessey, M., Frank, L., & Williams, P.L. (2020). Starving to be a student: The experiences of food insecurity among undergraduate students in Nova Scotia, Canada. *Canadian Food Studies, 7*(1), 107-125. https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v7i1.375

Bettache, K., Chiu, C., & Beattie, P. (2020). The merciless mind in a dog-eat-dog society: neoliberalism and the indifference to social inequality. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 34*, 217–222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.06.002

Blundell, L., Mathew, M., Bowley, M., & Roebothan, B. (2018). Determining Student Food

Insecurity at Memorial University of Newfoundland. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic*

Practice and Research, 80, 14-21. https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2018-026

Carson, E. A. (2014). Canadian Food Banks and the Depoliticization of Food Insecurity at the

Individual and Community Levels. *Canadian Review of Social Policy (1987)*, *70*, 7–21.

https://go-gale-

com.proxy1.lib.trentu.ca/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=ocul_thomas&id=GALE%7CA3807477

74&v=2.1&it=r&aty=ip

Clarke, A., & Parsell, C. (2022). Resurgent charity and the neoliberalizing social. *Economy*

and Society, 51(2), 307–329. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2021.1995977

Classens, M., & Sytsma, E. (2020). Student food literacy, critical food systems pedagogy,

and the responsibility of postsecondary institutions. *Canadian Food Studies, 7*(1), 8–19.

https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v7i1.370

Classens, M., Adam, K., & Srebot, S. (2023). Food systems change and the alternative

campus foodscape. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community*

Development, 12(3), 155–176. https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2023.123.010

Enns, A., Rizvi, A., Quinn, S., & Kristjansson, E. (2020). Experiences of Food Bank Access

and Food Insecurity in Ottawa, Canada. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition,*

15(4), 456–472. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.trentu.ca/10.1080/19320248.2020.1761502

Farahbakhsh, J., Hanbazaza, M., Ball, G. D. C., Farmer, A. P., Maximova, K., & Willows, N. D. (2017). Food insecure student clients of a university-based food bank have compromised health, dietary intake and academic quality. *Nutrition & Dietetics, 74*(1), 67–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12307

Fine, B., & Saad-Filho, A. (2017). Thirteen Things You Need to Know About Neoliberalism. *Critical Sociology, 43*(4–5), 685–706. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920516655387

Hattangadi, Vogel, E., Carroll, L. J., & Côté, P. (2019). "Everybody i know is always Hungry.. But nobody asks why": University students, food insecurity and mental health. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland), 11*(6), 1571–. https://doi.org/10.3390/su1106157

Health Canada. (2020). *Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview.* Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html

Kansanga, M. M.(2022). "Hunger in early life": exploring the prevalence and correlates of child food insecurity in Canada. *Agriculture & Food Security, 11*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-022-00371-8

Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA, Tarasuk V. (2023) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from https://proof.utoronto.ca/

63

McGuigan, J. (2014). The Neoliberal Self. *Culture Unbound, 6*(1), 223–240. https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146223

Middleton, Mehta, K., McNaughton, D., & Booth, S. (2018). The experiences and perceptions of food banks amongst users in high-income countries: An international scoping review. *Appetite, 120*, 698–708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.10.029

Murray, S., Gale, F., Adams, D., & Dalton, L. (2023). A scoping review of the conceptualisations of food justice. *Public health nutrition*, *26*(4), 725–737. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980023000101

Nazmi, A., Condron, K., Tseng, M., Volpe, R., Rodriguez, L., Lopez, M.L., Martinez, S.M., Freudenberg, N., & Bianco, S. (2023). SNAP participation decreases food insecurity among California public university students: a quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition 18*(1): 123-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2022.2099777

Olauson, C., Engler-Stringer, R., Vatanparast, H., & Hanoski, R. (2018). Student food insecurity: Examining barriers to higher education at the University of Saskatchewan. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, 13*(1), 19-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1393365

Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, A., Caldeira, K. M., Vincent, K. B., & Arria, A. M. (2018). Student Hunger on Campus: Food Insecurity Among College Students and Implications for

Academic Institutions. *American Journal of Health Promotion, 32*(2), 349–354.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117117719620

Pirrie, M., Harrison, L., Angeles, R., Marzanek, F., Ziesmann, A., & Agarwal, G. (2020). Poverty and food insecurity of older adults living in social housing in Ontario: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health, 20*(1), 1320–1320. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09437-3

Poppendieck, J. E. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. Canadian Food Studies, 9(2), 53–63. https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534

Poppendieck, J. (1998). *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*. Penguin Books.

Power, E., Dietrich, J., Walter, Z., & Belyea, S. (2021). "I don't want to say I'm broke": Student experiences of food insecurity at Queen's University. *Canadian Food Studies, 8*(1), 49-69. https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v8i1.423

Raine, K., McIntyre, L., & Dayle, J. B. (2003). The failure of charitable school- and community-based nutrition programmes to feed hungry children. *Critical Public Health*, *13*(2), 155–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/0958159031000097634

Riches, G. (2002). Food Banks and Food Security: Welfare Reform, Human Rights and Social Policy. Lessons from Canada? *Social Policy & Administration*, *36*(6), 648–663. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9515.00309

Sakellariou, D., & Rotarou, E. S. (2017). The effects of neoliberal policies on access to

healthcare for people with disabilities. *International journal for equity in health, 16*(1),

199. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-017-0699-3

Silverthorn, D. (2016). Hungry for knowledge: Assessing the prevalence of student food

insecurity on five Canadian campuses. Toronto: Meal Exchange. Retrieved from:

http://mealexchange.com

Smith-Carrier, T. (2020). Charity Isn't Just, or Always Charitable: Exploring Charitable and

Justice Models of Social Support. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, *5*(3),

157–163. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-020-00124-2

Smith-Carrier, T., Ross, K., Kirkham, J., & Decker Pierce, B. (2017). "Food is a Right …

Nobody Should Be Starving on Our Streets": Perceptions of Food Bank Usage in a

Mid-Sized City in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of Human Rights Practice, 9*(1), 29–49.

https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huw021

Statistics Canada. (2022). *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021: Population centre

(POPCTR).* (Catalogue number. 98-301-X).

https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/az/Definition-

eng.cfm?ID=geo049a

Statistics Canada. (2024). *Canadian Income Survey, 2022.* The Daily.

https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240426/dq240426a-eng.htm

Swales, May, C., Nuxoll, M., & Tucker, C. (2020). Neoliberalism, guilt, shame and stigma: A

    Lacanian discourse analysis of food insecurity. *Journal of Community & Applied Social*

    Psychology, 30(6), 673–687. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2475

Waity, J.F., Huelskamp, A., & Russell, J. (2020). Collaborating to Assess and Address Food

    Insecurity on a College Campus: a Case Study at a Mid-Sized, Regional University.

    Innovative Higher Education, 45, 405-417.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09512-y

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide

1. What is the program and what is your experience with it?

2. What is the history of the program/ were you involved in its beginnings?

3. What helps facilitate the smooth running of the program?

    a. In what ways does your institution help?

4. ~~.~~ Where do the main funds come from? Is it from the institution (operating funds or institutionally generated philanthropic donations) or community donations?

5. Were there any barriers to starting/implementing the program?

6. Are there any barriers to running the program? If yes, what are they?

7. Does your institution provide other kinds of support besides financial support? What are they?

If the participants don't note media support as one of their supports from the institution, you could ask this question:

8. Does your institution promote and help bring media attention to your program? Has your institution been vocal about student food insecurity?

Question to ask participants if they are feeling open to talking about their observations about the institutions.

9. Is your institution acknowledging the food needs and cost of food for students? If so,
    . And how is that reflected in their actions?

Question regarding privatization of food services: (Don't ask this question unless they bring up the privatization of food)

10. Are the food services on your campus privatized?
If yes, how has the privatization of food services on your campus affected the usage of these food support programs?

    . A. Have you noticed an increase or decrease in users in your program as food services have been privatized?

Appendix B – Invitation Email

Hello _____

My name is Holly Eckensweiler, I am a grad student in the Sustainability Studies program at Trent University. The focus of my thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of Ontario post-secondary institutions' food support systems, hence, my reason for reaching out.

(*Section discussing why I am interested in the program*)

I was wondering if you'd be interested in participating in my study or potentially contributing to my research. Moreover, if you'd be willing to participate in my research, I would like to know if I need to get permission from your institution first.

I am still currently in the preliminary phases of my research and have not gotten ethics approval yet. However, I wanted to reach out to you/your organization as part of my research planning. If you have any further inquiries about my research or wish to participate in my study please let me know. And I thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Respectfully,
Holly Eckensweiler

Appendix C – Information and Consent Form

Alternative Food Services: How are Campuses Addressing Student Food Insecurity

Researchers: *Holly Eckensweiler, Graduate Program in Sustainability Studies, Trent University, 1600 W Bank Dr, Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2,* Hollyeckensweiler@trentu.ca

Hello, you are invited to participate in a study focusing on exploring the use of alternative food support systems at post-secondary institutions and how they seek to address student food insecurity.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how non-corporate food systems operate within Ontario post-secondary institutions by engaging with service operators and learning how they seek to address student food insecurity through their programs. The study will focus on non-corporate or alternative food support services (FSS) that strive to address student food insecurity and similar goals such as those committed to providing nutritious food. Through engaging with FSS organizers and leads, the study will collect data about the history, goals, barriers and facilitators of the program and how they handle challenges. Student food insecurity is an important issue. Approximately one-third of students in Canada experience food insecurity, but the lack of research exploring FSSs reveals a gap in understanding how these systems address student food insecurity. Focusing on the services oriented toward supporting students will help us understand how they operate in a time of increased need.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: As a participant, you will be asked to complete an interview with me. In the interview, I will ask you about the history of your program, its daily operations, funding, staffing, and common barriers and facilitators to running the program. I will also ask you about whether and how food insecurity among post-secondary students is addressed at your institution. With your permission, I will audio-record your interview and later transcribe the interview for a readable document. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take written notes about our discussion during your interview. You will be asked to answer questions to the best of your knowledge. Your interview should take approximately 40 to 60 minutes, but the time will depend on your availability and interest. You will not be asked to disclose any personal or identifying information regarding those who access your program.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision not to participate will in no way influence the treatment you receive from me, nor will it impact your relationship with your organization (if it is aware of my study). During your interview, you can choose which questions you wish to discuss and what you want to share in response to them. You can stop participating in the study anytime up until I start to analyze my interview data (this could be a month to four months after your interview, depending on when it occurs). Once I've started data analysis with all transcribed interviews I won't be able to withdraw your specific data as it may interrupt my ongoing analyses. Your decision to withdraw your participation in my study will not affect your relationship with me, with Trent

University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed unless you explicitly permit me to retain your data for my analysis. You will have up to the point of analysis to withdraw from the study, this could be a month to four months depending on when I interview you.

Confidentiality: As a participant in my study, your privacy and confidentiality will be protected so that you can freely discuss your program's operations, successes, barriers to serving clientele., etc. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected in the following ways. a) you will be given a pseudonym following your interview, and your transcript will only be connected to your pseudonym; b) any identifying information that is brought up during the interviews will be anonymized or omitted; c). all information you supply during the research will be kept confidential, and any identifying information will not appear in any report or publication of the study; d). your consent form and interview transcripts will be stored safely in encrypted files on Trent's OneDrive, and only I (or my supervisors) will have access to them.. All data and files associated with my study will be destroyed (2) years after the completion of my MA in Sustainability Studies.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not anticipate that you will experience any risks or discomforts as a result of your participation in my study. While I will ask you to speak about funding challenges or other common barriers to the smooth operation of your organization, your identity as a participant will be held in confidence (i.e., your name, role, program, and affiliated post-secondary institution will not be revealed), thus, any critique of your institution will not be linked back to you or your specific program.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: You will experience no direct benefit, but your participation in this research will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of student food insecurity and the programs seeking to address it. Furthermore, the data collected may provide guidance on steps that need to be taken to address students' food insecurity needs.

How the Findings from this Study will be Shared: Upon completing my research, I hope to share my findings with other researchers concerned about food insecurity, for example, the Feeding City Lab, Culinaria Research Centre, University of Toronto ("Culinaria Research Centre", 2022). Similarly, I hope to possibly use the findings in an article in a journal, like Canada Food Studies. If you are interested, you may contact me by email to ask for a summary of my study findings after June 2025 (hollyeckensweiler@trentu.ca).

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Professor Mary Anne Martin (marymartin2@trentu.ca) or Peri Ballantyne (periballantyne@trentu.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Trent University Research Ethics Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines (Protocol # 29087). If you have any questions or concerns that you don't wish to share with the researcher, please contact:

Anna Kisiala
Coordinator, Research Conduct and Reporting
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Trent University
1600 West Bank Dr

Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2
705-748-1011 ext. 7866
annakisiala@trentu.ca

Signatures:

I, *(your name)*, consent to participate in the Alternative Food Services: How are Campuses Addressing Student Food Insecurity? study conducted by Holly Eckensweiler. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Oral Consent:

By verbally agreeing to take part in this study, you acknowledge that you understand what participating in this study entails and that you understand your rights as a participant. Do you voluntarily consent to participate in this study? (YES or NO) _____.

Audio Recording Consent:

I agree that the researcher may audio record the interview and I understand how the recording and transcript of it will be stored, used, and destroyed. (YES or NO) _____.

Signature _____   **Date** _____
Participant
Signature _____   **Date** _____
Principal Investigator