



Background

Houselink Community Homes has been providing housing and support since 1977. As of 2007 Houselink is providing housing to more than 420 people including both individuals and families. In addition to housing, Houselink offers programs and job opportunities accessible to residents and an additional 80 non-resident members.

The City of Toronto fully funds two kitchens. Additional funding for staff is available to us through the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care through our operating funding. Funds for program costs must be raised from private donors, foundations and businesses.

Currently, Houselink operates eleven community kitchens in five locations on a weekly basis and they are accessible to all members. The five locations are 805 Bloor Street West, 219 Broadview Avenue, 1245 King Street West also known as Channan Court building, 1117 Danforth Avenue, and 184 Harbord Street, also known as Harbord Street Mews.

In January 2007, The Funding Network – Toronto provided funding in the amount of \$11,966.39 for the operation of the equivalent of one community kitchen location for an entire year. This funding has been applied predominantly to the operation of our community kitchen at Harbord – the small surplus was allocated to our Danforth kitchen.

Outcomes achieved

Our community kitchens strive to meet 3 core objectives: improved nutrition and well-being among participants, eliminating social isolation and developing work/life skills. Based on a 2007 survey undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the community kitchens the following outcomes were realized.

1. Nutrition & well-being

- Our program served over 8200 meals in 5 locations throughout the year – an average of 1653 meals at each location. At Harbord we served 1099 meals and at the Danforth kitchen 2939.
- 75% of participants agreed that they have learned more about good nutrition. The age group of 16-24 benefit the most in learning more about good nutrition at the Community Kitchen as 100% of respondents agreed that they have learn more about good nutrition at the Community Kitchen.
- 73% responded that their health is better because of the Community Kitchen.

2. Breaking down social isolation & creating peer supports

- 65% responded that they enjoy helping to prepare the meals at the Community Kitchen.
- On average there are 16 people at a community kitchen meal. When surveyed about the preferred size of a community kitchen meal 48% indicated a preference for groups of 7-15 people, while 41% indicated a preference for even larger meals.



3. Developing life/work skills

- 56% responded that they have learned a lot about food preparation in the Community Kitchen.
- 71% responded that they have more confidence in their abilities.

How goals were realized

A kitchen facilitator assists members to plan and shop for meals, plus supervises the cooking. The training the members receive helps prepare them for potential jobs in food preparation and provides valuable life skills. Member volunteers also help with preparation and clean-up.

All members have access to the Food Program and they are welcome and encouraged to attend the community kitchens. At the community kitchen, members are able to take part in every aspect of the activities from planning menu, preparing, cleaning and sharing meals together. Participants contribute a \$1.00 for the meal. We have developed a variety of systems to facilitate this, members can purchase a five or ten dollars Meal Cards, pre-pay money in advance or utilize our I.O.U system. This means no member is ever turned away without a meal. TTC tokens are provided to members to facilitate attendance at Community Kitchen.

The Food Program also has a hotline where members can dial in to find out what is planned at each of the community kitchen. The hotline is updated on a weekly basis.

Staffing and Volunteers

The Food Program employs 1 full time Food Program Coordinator (FPC) who oversees the program and supervises the Community Kitchen Facilitators (C.K.F), two full-time C.K.Fs, and one part-time C.K.F through our Member Employment Program to facilitate the community kitchen.

The Food Program is supported by Supportive Housing Workers who provide hands-on support during the community kitchens. Food Program staff also work closely with Supportive Housing Workers in addressing members' needs and life skills development.

Houselink provides workshops and training. Community Kitchen Cooks complete the Toronto Public Health Food Handler Certification Program., First Aid & CPR courses and WHIMIS training. As a result of the training and experience, member cooks have found jobs in food services or used the opportunity as a gateway to further education in food preparation.

Significant Challenges

Growth and New Funding Partners

Since 1999, Houselink has experienced significant growth as an agency. Our success in delivering quality supportive housing has led to success securing additional government funding to expand our services. For example, in 2005 Houselink was selected as one of four agencies to implement a new housing program under the Mental Health and Justice Initiative.



While revenues overall have more than doubled since 1999, fundraising revenues – i.e. support from corporations, foundation and private donors has not kept up with the growing needs of our support programs.

We have begun to meet this challenge by reaching out for help from groups like the Funding Network - Toronto. Our broader more strategic approach to resource development (fundraising) has already begun to yield results. In 2006-07, we increased our net revenues from fundraising by 13%, driven our fundraising cost down by 20% and increased Gifts in Kind by 31%. We believe the early results of our efforts demonstrate that we are on the right track and we will be able to expand our private sector support, as planned, to continue to meet our program needs.

Location and access:

As we grow we have begun to come across geographic barriers. Locating community kitchens where they are easily accessible for all participants is a critical issue facing our program team. Typical member on these issues included:

- “Distance to travel to a Community Kitchen.”
- “Community Kitchen is too far to get to.”

Lessons Learned**Staffing**

A key item we learned from our survey of community kitchen participants was the role that staff played in supporting this program. 91% responded that Houselink staff are helpful at the community kitchen.

Physical Space

On average there are 17 people at a community kitchen meal. When surveyed about the preferred size of a community kitchen meal 48% indicated a preference for groups of 7-15 people, while 41% indicated a preference for even larger meals, 16 people or more.

Physical space constraints were frequently identified as an issue, particularly at our most popular location 805 Bloor.

Community Needs Identified

Other needs that the programming team has begun to address include:

- Assessing the feasibility and resources needed to begin early morning community kitchens.
- Workshops to help members with menu planning, reading nutrition labels, food preparation and budgeting for food.



Harbord Community Kitchen Budget 2007-08

Revenue	Projected	Actual
Existing Funding	7280	\$7,280.00
Member Contribution to the Program	\$1,040	\$1,099.50
<i>Tides Foundation - The Funding Network - Toronto</i>		\$11,966.39
Total Revenue	\$8,320.00	\$20,345.89
Expenses		
<i>Community Kitchen Facilitator (Existing Funding)</i>	\$7,280	\$7,280.00
Food	\$4,160	\$4,599.38
Community Kitchen Cooks	\$3,250	\$2,774.48
Transportation	\$2,704	\$0.00
grocery shopping	\$520	\$729.79
for members	\$2,184	\$2,340.00
Equipment for kitchen set up	\$500	\$869.73
Food Handlers Certificate Course (5 cooks)	\$800	\$357.50
WHMIS training (5 cooks)	\$800	\$357.50
<i>Transferred to Danforth kitchen</i>		\$1,037.51
Total Expenses	\$19,494	\$20,345.89
Surplus / Deficit	(\$11,174)	\$0.00