



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

June 4, 2013

## The Stop and the Community Food Centre Model

In 1998, when I became Executive Director of Toronto's The Stop Community Food Centre, the small urban food bank was like thousands of other cramped, dreary, makeshift spaces — a last-hope refuge where desperate people could stave off hunger for one more day with a hamper filled with wilted produce and packaged foods. In spite of the best efforts and intentions of generous volunteers, for food bank users, knowing that this was their best bet for a meal was a humiliating experience.

Since that time, The Stop has undergone a radical reinvention, changing to meet the needs of community members who said they wanted a place where they could be cooks and gardeners and involved citizens. Over the years, participation has overcome embarrassment, and the isolation of poverty has been replaced with a vibrant community that uses food to build hope and skills, and to reach out to those who need a meal, a hand and a voice. What was once a simple food bank is now a thriving, internationally respected Community Food Centre with gardens, kitchens, healthy drop-in meals, a greenhouse, markets, a good food bank, peer advocacy, education programs and a mission to create lasting change in our food system.

With 3 million Canadians now considered food insecure, and food bank use up 31% since 2008, it's clear that the traditional method of charitable food assistance isn't the answer to hunger in our communities. The Stop's aim is to create a dignified and welcoming environment that answers an

immediate food need and then engages people in programs that build health and food skills and invite them to take action on issues that affect them. It also tries to be an upstream answer to growing health concerns. Obesity and other diet-related illnesses are at historic highs. More than 9 million Canadians have diabetes or pre-diabetes, and rates of Type 2 diabetes — which is strongly linked to unhealthy eating — are over four times higher in the lowest income group than the highest. By bringing people together around healthy food, Community Food Centres allow people to connect across cultures, age, backgrounds and even language in an environment that builds health, reduces social isolation and increases community belonging and access to supports.

Overwhelming interest in The Stop's model led Program Manager Kathryn Scharf, Charles Levkoe and I to publish a Metcalf Solutions Paper in 2010 titled *In Every Community a Place for Food*, which sought to lay out how the Community Food Centre model could work in other communities. Following the paper's publication, we launched a pilot process at The Stop through which we partnered with organizations in Perth and Stratford, ON to develop CFCs in those communities. Those centres launched in 2012, alongside a new national organization called Community Food Centres Canada, whose goal is to work with partners to develop fifteen

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB  
309-323 Portage Ave.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3B 2C1

phone  
(204) 927-3200

email  
[ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca)

website  
[www.policyalternatives.ca/  
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog  
[www.policyfix.ca](http://www.policyfix.ca)

twitter  
@ccpamb



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new Community Food Centres across the country over the next five years. In March 2013, we announced new partnerships with the Dartmouth Family Centre in North Dartmouth, NS; the CRC at 40 Oaks in Toronto's Regent Park neighbourhood; and the NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre in the Inkster neighbourhood of Winnipeg. Extensive community consultations will see Community Food Centres launch appropriate programming in these high-needs communities. (For example, programming at The NorWest Co-op CFC in Inkster may include a lunch program, community kitchens and gardens, a low-cost market, and peer action and community action) Together, this growing network of CFCs will be a positive force in pushing for more equitable and progressive policies around food in Canada.

In our book *The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement*, Andrea Curtis, my wife and co-author, and I tell the remarkable story of The Stop's transformation, of the people who contributed to it, and how a growing network of Community Food Centres can be a positive force in pushing for more equitable and progressive policies around food in Canada.

*Nick Saul is a Queen's Jubilee Award Winner and recipient of the prestigious Jane Jacobs Award (2008) for making Toronto a more liveable city.*

The Community Food Centre concept, as developed by CFCC, is part of a broader local food security movement which is developing responses to the need for healthy, affordable food while building people's skills.

Some other Manitoba examples are Winnipeg Harvest's new Community Food Distribution and Training Centre, which offers an expanded distribution centre, an urban garden, a training kitchen to help low-income families acquire the skills to produce nutritious meals, and a gathering space. The Winnipeg Foodshare Coop distributes over 500 fresh food boxes monthly at an affordable price to families across Winnipeg. The Good Food Club is a neighbourhood-based program that builds local skills through food and nutrition workshops, opportunities to work on local farms, farmer's markets and community dinners. Food Matters Manitoba educates Manitoba about food security and the sustainability of food systems. All of these approaches strengthen people's relationship to food and community while creating more linkages to food producers and the land.

## Launch of **The Stop**

**Meet Nick Saul at  
McNally Robinson Grant Park (1120  
Grant Park Ave.) on Thursday, June 6,  
from 7:30 to 9:30 pm**

The event is free, and will take place in the store's Travel Alcove Space. For more information, visit [www.cfccanada.ca/events](http://www.cfccanada.ca/events) or follow Community Food Centres Canada on Twitter or Facebook.

CCPA-MB  
309-323 Portage Ave.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3B 2C1

### phone

(204) 927-3200

### email

[ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca)

### website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/  
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

### blog

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