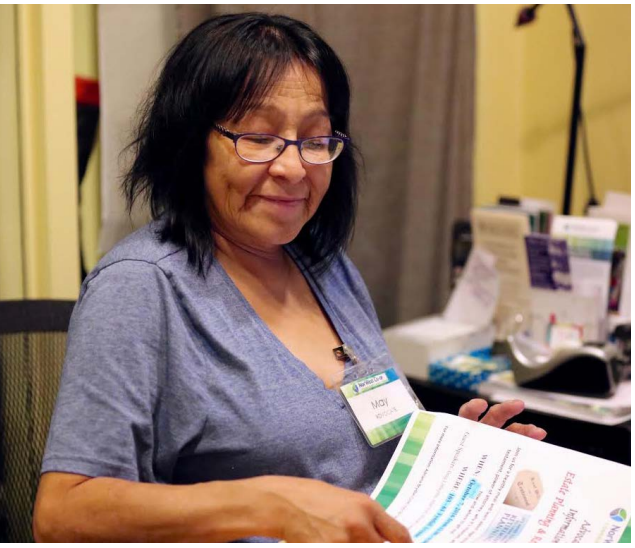

LET'S MOBILIZE!

How to start a Community Action Program

community food centres
CANADA cfccanada.ca

ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual documents the best practices emerging from Community Food Centres (CFCs) across Canada on how to start, run, sustain, and evaluate a Community Action Program (CAP). It's based on the shared knowledge and experiences we have amassed in our communities, and is intended for organizations that help low-income community members with poverty-related issues or that work to engage their community in advocating for social change.

Our goal is to share our strategies for helping people who live on a low income navigate the system of social services and government entitlements. We also offer advice on how to engage and mobilize community members to take action on local issues and the larger structural forces that are ultimately responsible for food insecurity and poverty.

We discuss how to set the conditions for social change, as well as the challenges and barriers you can expect to confront in this work, and include tips for anticipating and addressing issues in advance. Given the importance of celebrating successes and small victories, we also highlight some of our achievements so you can see what winning looks like at the grassroots level.

Each section of this manual contains resources that will support community action work, whether by an individual embarking on it for the first time or an organization looking to expand its community action toolkit.

We encourage you to share what you learn here with like-minded organizations. The more people who are committed to this movement, the stronger the force for change.

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INTRODUCTION

At Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC), we build health, belonging, and social justice in low-income communities across Canada through the power of food. We've seen how food can be a transformative force for people living in poverty, and we know that to create lasting change we must take action at the systemic level and empower low-income community members, our partner organizations, and concerned citizens to learn about and advocate for policies that reduce poverty, food insecurity, and poor health.

The Community Food Centre model is based on three pillars: healthy food access, food skills, and engagement and civic education. This manual focuses on the work within our third pillar: Community Action Programs (CAPs).

By focusing on education and civic engagement, CAPs build individual skills and support personal empowerment. CAP participants learn how it's possible to affect systemic change using advocacy campaigns that confront the underlying issues leading to poverty and hunger.

Community Action Programs are based on a model that was originally developed by the very first Community Food Centre in Canada — The Stop Community Food Centre. Located in a diverse neighbourhood in Toronto, ON, The Stop has been at the forefront of dignified, innovative programs for over 30 years, garnering national attention since the mid- to late 2000s for its holistic approach to food and anti-poverty advocacy. Publicly challenging the limitations of the traditional food bank model and the underlying causes of food insecurity using grassroots campaigns, The Stop received considerable media attention, and the more people learned about their innovative approach, the more requests they received for site visits and further information.

In light of the heightened interest, senior staff members started to analyze The Stop's model in order to identify aspects that could help other communities. After successfully piloting the model in Perth and Stratford, ON, a new organization — Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) — was founded in 2012 to create new food centres across the country and develop the resources to support the growth of the movement. Since then, new Community Food Centres have been established in Calgary, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Dartmouth, and Toronto's Regent Park with more in development.

At the same time, our partnerships have expanded beyond CFC sites to a new level of engagement with over 100 "Good Food Organizations" across Canada and beyond who share our commitment to building health, dignity, and empowerment through food. Through this growing network, we are building capacity for transformational change.

This manual is the culmination of what we have collectively learned about starting, running, sustaining, and evaluating Community Action Programs. We hope it will support your organization in empowering individuals and building capacity for the policy changes we need to eliminate poverty and food insecurity in Canada.

Education & Engagement Programs

THE ISSUES WE'RE FACING

SHAME AND STIGMA

People with lived experience of poverty often feel an acute **sense of shame** as a result of the pervasive social stigma surrounding poverty, which in turn creates a **sense of powerlessness** and lack of agency.[1]

POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Poverty is a known risk factor for developing mental illness. Food insecurity is **linked to increased incidence of mood and anxiety disorders.**[2]

DISENGAGEMENT

People living on low incomes often lack the time, resources and networks to take effective action on the wider issues impacting them and their communities. **Voter turn-out in Canada tends to be lower among those in lower income brackets**.[3]

OUR RECIPE FOR CHANGE

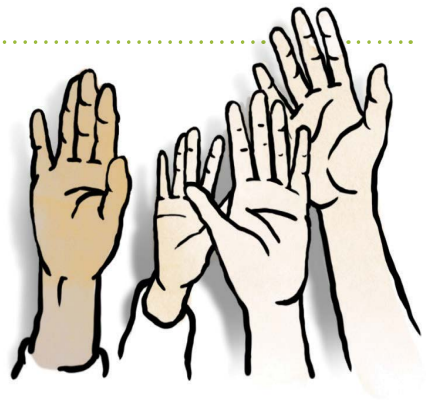
1. **Support people with lived experience of poverty and marginalization to build skills and confidence, and create opportunities for them** to become peer advocates and help community members access the supports they need.
2. **Encourage volunteerism among program participants** and foreground leadership opportunities.
3. **Create ways for people to take action and have a voice on the issues that affect them.** Never lose sight of the role of government in addressing food insecurity and poverty, diet-related illness, and our unsustainable food system at scale.

KEY INGREDIENTS

- Recognize the challenges facing people who live on low incomes; create ways for everyone to participate at a level where they feel comfortable
- Peer support
- Referrals to other Community Food Centre programs and local services
- Links between personal and local challenges and wider systemic issues
- Multiple levels of involvement (e.g. volunteer positions, leadership roles)
- Material and social supports to remove barriers to participation
- Fun and rewarding process

PROGRAMS ON THE MENU

+ Peer advocacy support
+ Social justice clubs
+ Public awareness and education campaigns
+ Volunteer program



THE CHANGE WE'RE COOKING UP

↑	↓	↑	↑	↑
CONNECTIONS TO A VARIETY OF SUPPORTS	STIGMA	INTEREST AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES	CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION TO GET INVOLVED	VOLUNTEERISM AND LEADERSHIP

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

"I voted during the municipal election for the first time."

–Community member at The Local Community Food Centre (Stratford, ON)

92%

of Social justice club members had increased knowledge of poverty, social justice and food system issues

"After losing my full-time job... I was feeling useless to make change and depressed. Joining this social justice group gave me a place to have my views appreciated, useful and heard."

–Community member at The Table Community Food Centre (Perth, ON)

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM?

Community Action Programs (CAPs) are intended to help people navigate and gain access to social services and government entitlements that help mitigate the effects of poverty. They are supportive spaces designed to help community members build the skills they need to become self-advocates and advocates for others in their community, and to help facilitate a transition out of poverty. CAPs also educate community members on the changes needed to address the systemic issues that are ultimately responsible for poverty and food insecurity.

Community Food Centres Canada believes that governments must be accountable to people who are living in poverty. However, we know this is unlikely to happen unless the government is pressured to change. CAPs help community members identify, articulate, and work toward inducing policies that can eliminate food insecurity and poverty.

CAPs tackle questions such as:

- Why does economic inequality exist?
- What changes do we want to see in our community?
- What changes need to happen in order for us to have enough money to buy healthy food?

If we consider these questions as part of a collective framework (not just on an individual basis), it highlights the need for progressive social policies, rather than just assuming human behaviours need to change. As organizations, we need to develop more creative and empowering solutions that go beyond the emergency stop-gap of feeding empty bellies.

CAPs operate on the belief that the movement for change needs to be based in people's lived experiences of injustice and inequality, and that those affected by an issue should have a leading role in deciding what action should be taken. "Nothing about us without us" is one of our core guiding principles.

"Nothing about us without us"

Because our communities are diverse and often vulnerable and marginalized, CAPs prioritize people and their experiences, language, and political beliefs and offer an inclusive, safe, and supportive space where they can talk about food security, poverty, and exclusion.

While each Community Food Centre offers a Community Action Program, how it looks in practice varies in response to local needs, resources, and organizational capacity (staffing, program funding, etc.). A CAP may also adapt over time to reflect changing needs. The original (and ideal) Community Action Program consists of three core areas:

1. Community Action Training program
2. Peer advocacy
3. Social justice club

Community Action Program goals

1. Build the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence of Community Action trainees so they can contextualize personal experiences, navigate services and entitlements, and advocate on their own behalf as well as others.
2. Establish a Community Action peer advocacy program so community members have increased access to services and entitlements.
3. Provide peer advocates with opportunities to improve their skills, broaden their experiences, and grow self-confidence.
4. Increase community participation in public education and advocacy campaigns relating to hunger and poverty through a social justice club and events.
5. Increase social inclusion/reduce social isolation through peer advocacy programs, a social justice club, and events.

Tips for enjoying the process and staying motivated

- Focus on proper facilitation. It leads to productive meetings.
- Find ways for people to be involved at the level they are comfortable with and in a way that makes use of their skills and strengths, and adds value to their lives.
- Because "ending poverty" is such a big and long-term goal, it can lead to frustration and apathy; be sure to set intermediate goals and celebrate successes when you achieve them.
- Be sure to also set smaller, winnable goals. For example, confront your social assistance office's arbitrary denial of a benefit. In doing so, you can put new skills to work and immediately improve the lives of other community members.
- While large-scale systemic changes are needed, also look for small-scale local improvements, such as a community garden or a bike project. These kinds of initiatives help people practice self-determination and build micro-solutions suited to local needs.
- A big part of community organizing involves laying the groundwork up front so communities have the capacity to participate in or push for change when the moment arrives. You never really know when the conditions will be right for change to happen. The process can be slow or stalled and then jump forward unexpectedly. Stay hopeful by remembering that change can happen fast, and be ready.
- Connect with other social justice groups who are doing similar work. If you can, plan to spend some time together, even if it's just once or twice a year. It builds solidarity, inspires, and motivates.

SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Community action work requires ongoing and sustained effort. While there are no prescriptive rules, we've identified the following best practices for setting the conditions for community engagement and change:

1. Add value and meet people where they are at.
If you are trying to mobilize people to take action, what you ask of them needs to be relevant to their lives and add value. People who are marginalized are struggling with everyday decisions others take for granted, such as how they are going to get to their doctor's appointment or where their next meal is coming from. We need to recognize participants' basic material needs and address some of their barriers in order to get people in the door, which is why embedding community action within a Community Food Centre (CFC) makes good sense. Existing programs offer value by responding to specific needs such as meals, transit support, or childcare, as resources permit.

2. Understand that poverty is an isolating experience.
It's not unusual for people who live on a low-income to have limited social supports and few opportunities for new experiences. When developing a program, look for opportunities to connect people and ways to inspire them. Introduce participants to new ideas and experiences, whether guest speakers, films, or road trips — it's critical to their engagement in the program and, ultimately, the program's success. These opportunities also lay the foundations for friendships to flourish, ideas to blossom, and community to build.

3. Recognize and utilize the assets of community members.
Always look for opportunities that allow community members to share their experiences and skills. Participants can organize or facilitate tasks, or use their experiences navigating poverty and community resources to help others in the Advocacy Office. Actively seek out these opportunities and make them available to community members.

4. Stay focused.
Activists are often very critical thinkers. They are good at knowing what they are "against," but they should also spend time thinking about what they are "for." Group conversations can easily become bogged down by personal issues or interpersonal dynamics. While people need time and space to share their personal struggles, it's important to maintain a forward-thinking agenda and to strategize how the group can take action on the issues they have prioritized. This may mean dedicating specific times or special meetings where personal sharing can happen.

5. Celebrate.
Make time to celebrate even small successes and to relax, share meals, and laugh together.

The Local CFC's social justice club donned their "food security" t-shirts and took to the streets in support of the Chew on This! campaign to end poverty and food insecurity in Canada.

RELATED RESOURCES

Community Action Program logic model
(Appendix G)


Make
Matter


the time
is ripe
for change
hell yes,
we will grow!
upset the
apple cart!


ADVOCACY
OFFICE
Please wait

THREE PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

COMMUNITY ACTION TRAINING

The Community Action Training (CAT) program is designed to help community members develop the skills they need to stand up for their rights and take leadership on issues important to them.

Remember, the program curriculum places the experiences of the participants first. Low-income community members are already experts at understanding poverty. Start by learning about people's lived experiences and the resources available in your community. Designing the program in response to local needs is critical — an issue that resonates in one community may not resonate in another. This approach allows participants to put their lived experiences in a political framework, find common ground, and develop the skills and resources they need to take action on personal and local issues.

Co-developed by CFCC and Community Food Centres, the Community Action Training is a modular course system which coordinators can pick and choose from to suit local needs. Program modules include building communication skills, conflict resolution, understanding social movements, the social determinants of health, developing a plan, information and rights, the ABCs of advocacy, mental health, power and privilege, and self-care (see Appendix H for a sample curriculum outline). Different programs place different emphasis on big-picture issues, local resources, and the building of personal skills. It is ideal to plan discussions that contains all three; for example, combine a big-picture topic with a thematically linked local resource topic (say, a discussion of the modern welfare state and the erosion of the social safety net along with how to access social assistance entitlements).

While the Community Action Training program is a prerequisite for becoming a peer advocate (see p. 11), the program is also a gateway into other social justice programs, especially when the peer advocate roster is already full. Graduates of the program often become more involved in social justice work, whether at the Community Food Centre's social justice club (see p. 15) or elsewhere. The CAT curriculum can therefore be quite flexible. If the majority of CAT participants will go on to become peer advocates, many coordinators opt to provide an in-depth orientation to government entitlements and community resources in the training so the group is well equipped in their peer advocacy role. In other instances, when the majority of CAT participants will go onto more general social justice programs, the deeper dive into how to advocate for community members and manage their files is left out of the curriculum and offered only to peer advocate trainees.

CAT programs often utilize local experts and community organizers to facilitate workshops. For example, if you want to address mental health and illness, consider inviting in a professional from your local Canadian Mental Health Association branch. Or if you want to address legal issues, reach out to your local legal clinic. This approach also creates an opportunity for participants to network and build connections with professionals in the community.

Sometimes you may not be able to find a suitable facilitator or you might not be able to overcome conflicts with schedules. Advance planning will help you minimize scheduling conflicts. When smart planning falls short, think of it as an opportunity to get creative and present the material in an alternate way.

While the duration of the training program can vary depending on your community's needs, we recommend scheduling 10-12 weeks. Becoming an effective advocate takes time, and a lot of material needs to be covered. It's important not to rush.

When running your program, address access issues to the best of your organization's ability. For example, offer childcare or public transit tokens. If possible, provide a

Graduates of The Local CFC's Community Action Training pose with their certificates.

grocery voucher as a small gesture to recognize a participant's valuable time. Include a meal with each meeting and offer a plentiful supply of tea, coffee, and water.

While group size can vary, 10 to 12 people total is ideal. Limiting the group size will ensure everyone in the group has an opportunity to speak as well as make things more manageable for the facilitator. That said, do account for attrition when selecting applicants since it's common for some people not to show up after applying or for some to drop out after the first week.

Community Action Training application process

The Community Action Training program application consists of a short questionnaire and mandatory attendance at an information session. Three good questions to ask on the questionnaire include:

1. How are you connected to the organization?
2. What is your experience of poverty and/or food insecurity?
3. What changes would you like to see in the community?

During the information session a CAP coordinator will describe the program and engage the participants in a few group activities. Group activities allow people to become better acquainted with the program and allow the coordinator to develop a sense of how well participants will work in a group setting and whether they are committed to seeing the training through to the end.

Once the application deadline has closed, the coordinator will review the applications and make final selections based on an equal representation of gender, racialization, immigration status, age, and ability. The coordinator will also take into consideration their observations from the information session to select participants who will work well in a group, who seem committed to seeing it through, and who are likely to use the training program as a jumping-off point for future involvement in the Community Action Program.

Once participants have completed the Community Action Training, graduates are eligible to become a peer advocate in the Advocacy Office. Because they offer compensation and work experience that can lead to employment, these positions are often viewed as desirable.

KERRYLOU'S STORY

Kerrylou's story exemplifies the transformative power of the Community Action Program. After working at a local factory in Stratford, ON for over ten years, Kerrylou suffered from a repetitive strain injury that was making it increasingly difficult for her to perform her job. After rounds of physiotherapy and attempts at different jobs within the company, she had no choice but to resign. Faced with a tough job market and no post-secondary education, Kerrylou knew that her way back to income security was dependent on retraining.

During an appointment with a career counsellor, she learned about The Local's Community Food Centre Community Action Training program in Stratford. While deciding which educational path to pursue, Kerrylou enrolled in CAT thinking it would be an opportunity for her to gain some new skills. It wasn't too long into the training when her future plans crystallized.

After the training ended, Kerrylou immediately applied to become an advocate at The Local's Advocacy Office. Soon after, she enrolled in the Social Service Worker program at Conestoga College.

During her two-year college program, Kerrylou ran The Local's CAT program as part of her diploma requirements while continuing to advocate for social justice issues, especially housing. Her local advocacy efforts resulted in Stratford City Council increasing their affordable housing budget.

After completing her Social Services Worker diploma, a job opening for a Community Action Coordinator became available at The Local. Kerrylou applied and has been on board ever since.

Today Kerrylou has the advantage of having sat on both sides of the table and uses that experience to help new participants and share her passion for making her community, and our country, a better place.

THE ADVOCACY OFFICE

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE ADVOCACY OFFICE?

The Community Advocacy Office aims to empower people with lived experience of poverty by creating an opportunity for them to offer peer support to others who are struggling; by doing this, members gain the skills, experience, and confidence that will help them to reach their potential.

People who work in an Advocacy Office have lived experience of poverty and often other forms of oppression and marginalization. Most are living on social assistance, and many have past or current mental health issues. Many advocates live in subsidized housing, are single parents, or have experienced violence. As a group, advocates are familiar with almost any situation that comes up in the Advocacy Office, and their personal experience is useful to others navigating the system.

Advocacy Offices are most often staffed by two advocates at a time. Working in pairs allows them to support one another and pool their knowledge and experience. For example, some advocates are experts in disability services while others know tenants' rights laws inside out; some are good at online research while others feel more confident on the telephone. This combined experience enhances the support others receive when seeking help.

A number of issues typically brought to the Advocacy Office are common to all Community Food Centres. In order of frequency, they are as follows:

Money matters: Income, discretionary benefits, and subsidies

With income being the most profound determinant of health, it's not surprising that accessing income assistance programs, income benefits, discretionary funds, or program subsidies represent a significant amount of the work advocates deal with on a daily basis.

Advocates help individuals and families apply for social assistance online and set up their intake appointment. If social assistance recipients are experiencing difficulty contacting their caseworker or accessing discretionary benefits, they advocate on the client's behalf and support them in completing any necessary documentation. Accessing the suite of social assistance benefits available can make a significant difference in someone's monthly income. Benefits can include a transit pass or transit tokens, start-up funds for moving, or allowances to help with expenses related to a new job. Of course, many benefits vary from province to province, but it's worth doing the research locally. For example, special nutrition benefits exist to address specific health-related dietary needs. The monthly supplement ranges from $30 to $250 in Ontario, to $27 to $150 in Nova Scotia — an amount that would certainly make a difference in a low-income earner's grocery budget.

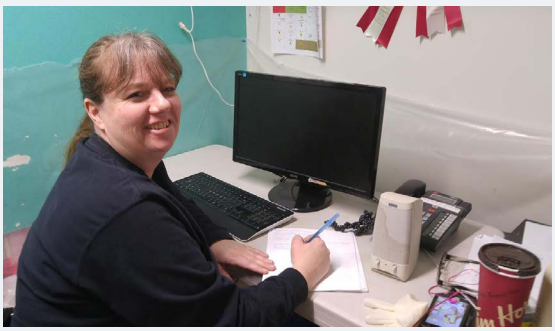
Many social assistance recipients who visit the Advocacy Office identify as having a disability but have not been successful in transitioning from general welfare to a disability support program. Advocates often help these individuals with their disability application by connecting them with the healthcare professional they need to complete their medical assessment, assisting them with the self-assessment, and writing an accompanying letter

VICKI'S STORY

Vicki learned about The Table Community Food Centre (CFC) in Perth, ON, shortly after they opened their doors in 2012. At that time she was completing her high-school diploma, and one of her instructors passed out some community resources, including a brochure for Perth County's newly established CFC. Intrigued, Vicki stopped by a couple of days later to find out more. Within a few weeks she was signed up for The Table's first Community Action Training program.

Vicki describes the CAT program as a "life-changing experience, one that empowered me and helped me to find my voice." After completing the program, she applied for the paid peer advocate position and has been on board ever since.

Vicki continues to be involved in other programs at The Table, including Shovel and Spoon, a community gardening program. Her work in the Advocacy Office supplements her other part-time position as a grocery store cashier. She finds helping others personally fulfilling and rewarding. "Every day I can see the difference this work makes in people's lives," she says. "And the extra income from working as an advocate makes a big difference in my budget."



THE STOP'S ODSP ACTION PROJECT

Nearly 50% of people who use The Stop Community Food Centre's food bank in Toronto, ON, identify as having a disability, but only approximately 25% receive disability benefits. Since the amount of money a person receives on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is almost double what they receive on Ontario Works (OW), helping someone with their ODSP application has the potential of making a significant difference in their lives.

When trying to support people with their ODSP application, The Stop's peer advocates found that a large number of community members didn't have a family doctor, never mind a psychiatrist, to complete their medical assessment — an immediate deal breaker for any application. In 2010, The Stop formed a partnership with the Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC) and the Intercity Health Associates in order to bridge the gaps. Every Monday afternoon, Intercity Health Associates send a psychiatrist to complete ODSP mental health assessments. DPNCHC provides the space and the medical administration. The Advocacy Office connects with community members who identify as having a disability, books appointments, helps the person with their self-assessment, and submits the applications after the psychiatrist has completed them. As a result of this initiative, dozens of residents have been successful with their ODSP application.

of support. In fact, supporting clients in transitioning from general welfare to disability is one of the Advocacy Office's biggest successes. Because the success of a disability application is very dependent on its thoroughness, it's not uncommon for applications that were formerly denied to be approved because of the peer advocate's support and diligence in the application process (see The Stop's ODSP Action Project above and Appendix A: Income Supports).

As of this manual's publication, a tool is being developed by Prosper Canada to help people assess their eligibility for tax rebates and government entitlements in Ontario and Manitoba. See www.prospercanada.org for details and other financial empowerment resources. See Appendix A (Income Supports) for a summary of commonly accessed income tax benefits (e.g. special diet, volunteer supplement).

Energy subsidies

Energy subsidies — which are provincial programs that serve to offset energy costs for low-income earners — can be dealt with by the Advocacy Office depending on the province. In Ontario, peer advocates undergo government training to administer subsidies between $45 to $500 a year (see side bar p. 13). Dartmouth North Community Food Centre in Nova Scotia, where the benefit paid to low-income earners is up to $200 a year, also assists clients with printing and filling out energy subsidy applications. The Province of Alberta offers a one-time emergency fund from the Red Cross, and additional assistance is offered through select community organizations. There, the CFC doesn't administer anything officially but peer advocates do refer community members out to these services.

Affordable housing

Next to income security and ways to make life more affordable, the Advocacy Office is regularly asked to help with housing issues. From tenants' rights and evictions notices to subsidized housing applications, advocates help community members navigate the system and negotiate solutions. They also typically have a list of more affordable housing units available through the private market and can advise on municipal and regional subsidies that can make private market options more accessible for low-income households.

Many clients come forward with a complaint that their tenant rights have been violated. In these cases, advocates often try to negotiate a solution between tenants and landlords. If a landlord has made an application to evict a tenant, the advocate will refer the tenant to the community legal clinic so they can access legal representation at their hearing. Sometimes landlords will try to evict people illegally without going through the proper processes. In these cases, advocates can educate the tenant and the landlord on the law, and when necessary involve the legal clinic or even the police, if required.

Other supports

The Advocacy Office also helps clients with other recurring issues, including access to physicians (including optometrists and dentists), counselling services, exterminators (getting rid of bedbugs), emergency shelters, and assistance filling out immigration forms.

Sometimes community members come to the Advocacy Office seeking to connect with someone who understands what they are experiencing, and who can lend a friendly, supportive ear. The value of these encounters should not be underestimated. Poverty can be a very isolating experience, and the Advocacy Office is a place for people to connect with others and make new friends.

"[The advocacy office] helped us with our finances and emotionally and legally get things in order. Now we get out more, have friends, and have gotten the help we need to get the services and support we need. There should be more programs like this around."

— Advocacy Office participant, **Dartmouth North CFC**

THE PEER ADVOCATE'S ROLE

An advocate position could be characterized as a grassroots social worker position for which lived experience is most often a qualification. To be eligible, individuals must have completed the Community Food Centre's Community Action Training program. In fact, it's not unusual for successful applicants to take the training twice, since it helps to solidify their experience.

Becoming an advocate is an exciting opportunity that can lead to personal empowerment, increased confidence, and new opportunities. On a personal level, current and past advocates often remark how good it feels to help people and the tremendous sense of purpose they experience as a result of their work. On a professional level, working as an advocate opens doors for connecting with other professionals and agencies in the not-for-profit sector and provides opportunities for further training and skill-building. Community Food Centres have a relatively high profile in their communities, so being an

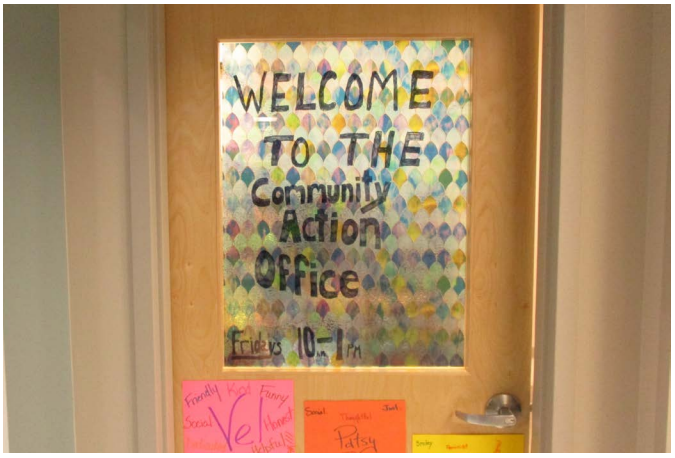
ENERGY SUBSIDY PROGRAMS TAKE SOME PRESSURE OFF TIGHT BUDGETS

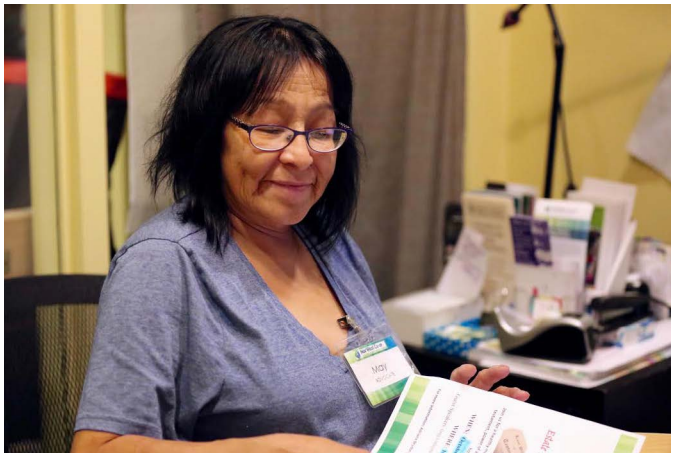
In November 2015, The Table CFC's Advocacy Office assumed administration of the energy subsidy program from the Lanark County Housing office. In Ontario, the program offers low-income households access to some financial relief through the administration of the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program funded by Hydro, and the Ontario Energy Supplement program funded by consumers.

The amount of the benefit depends on a number of factors, but the highest subsidy tends to be around $45 a month, with an annual maximum of $500 (unless you have electric heat, in which case the subsidy might be as high as $600).

Advocates underwent training to assist community members with some financial relief. Staff training is required in order to administer these programs, as the application process is often onerous, especially when documentation needed to complete the application is missing. (That's one of the reasons it's a good fit for the Advocacy Office.) For the applicants, these subsidies make a big difference. When you are living on a tight budget, an extra $45 can make a big difference in someone's grocery budget.

Introducing this program has also been a great way to get new people through the door and familiarize them with other programs and services they may find helpful.





Guidelines and boundaries in the Advocacy Office

Establishing clear boundaries in the Advocacy Office from the onset will help you avoid and minimize potential issues. We recommend the following guidelines:

- Peer advocates should never give money to, or accept gifts from, community members.
- If an advocate has a very personal relationship with someone (because they are related or live in close proximity) they should recommend that the community member should speak with a different advocate.
- All advocates must be bound to the same confidentiality agreements as staff.
- If a person in the Advocacy Office makes reference to child abuse or thoughts of suicide, advocates are to immediately engage the CAP coordinator or another staff member.
- On rare occasions, advocates may make a home visit. Home visits should only happen in pairs and only after the consent of the CAP coordinator, who should be advised of the address and time of visit.
- If an advocate is writing a letter on someone's behalf on the CFC's letterhead, the letter must be proofread by a staff member before it is sent out.

advocate can strengthen one's credibility and candidacy when applying for new employment opportunities.

Given the value of work being performed in the Advocacy Office, it's important to recognize the contribution advocates make through some form of paid compensation. In fact, payment is an important feature of the Community Action Program model. Each CFC takes a slightly different approach, and there are pros and cons to each. Some pay on an hourly basis, while others pay an honorarium. Some have tried both systems, depending on social assistance clawback rules and dynamics in the program at any given time. While a good argument can be made for treating advocates as staff (and some CFCs do), this may imply that the positions are permanent. The downside may be that people do not cycle out of the program in order to give others an opportunity to participate (see "Term Limits" on p. 15).

In some provinces, the compensation advocates receive for their work is not clawed back by social assistance the same way that a salary or wage would; this means advocates can benefit from both the experience and the added income offered by the program. For example, in Ontario, advocates can earn up to $200 dollars monthly before the money is deducted from their benefits. In Nova Scotia, advocates can earn up to $500 a year in the form of an honorarium without affecting their benefits (a T4 needs to be issued if the amount is above $500). The Alex CFC in Calgary works around clawbacks by compensating their advocates with a gift card. When deciding how to compensate your advocates, be sure to check what provincial rules apply and which option is most beneficial. While peer advocate roles rarely provide the same income that a full-time job would, it is important to clarify that any payment should be seen as an income supplement. The extra funds can still make a difference.

When an advocate gets paid for office work and also participates in unpaid community organizing work alongside volunteers, things can get complicated. The volunteers may feel that their time is not being valued in the same way. While each CFC will address this issue in their own way, we encourage organizations to clarify individual expectations around these roles and what is defined as paid vs. unpaid work.

NAVIGATING MORE RADICAL OPINIONS

Many people who engage in the Community Action Program's advocacy work feel passionately about issues, yet those with extreme political views can readily stymie conversation and group process. It falls, then, to the coordinator to balance each participant's right to hold political views with the need to keep the group focused and functioning.

At The Alex CFC in Calgary, Syma, the Community Action Program Coordinator, shared a situation when a radical leftist, while vital to the community, was not in agreement with the CFC's more measured approach to activism. The community member regularly derailed discussions and blocked the group from moving forward. Syma gave the individual space to make her arguments and worked to find commonality. She described this group member as a valuable asset to the Centre, but the situation as an ongoing struggle. "We let the individual know that we agree to disagree. This made things a little better, but we still experience ongoing difficulty…"

Examples like this shine a light on how important it is to establish ground rules and manage expectations with your participants from the outset. Even screening participants in an intake process may help ensure that the group is comprised of those who can function within the established parameters.

When it comes to facilitating discussion, set a time limit for discussion topics to avoid any one thing dominating; communicate any off-limit topics; and pause any off-topic conversations that arise and returns to them later if there's time. Ultimately, the Community Action Program needs to be a safe space for as many people as possible and it's up to the coordinator to manage the membership in the name of smooth operations.

TERM LIMITS FOR THE ADVOCACY OFFICE

An advocate is intended to be a gateway position that leads to work in other agencies such as community centres, food banks, drop-ins, or shelters. Fulfilling the role also helps some advocates build the confidence to return to school. Since it is, in essence, a training position, advocates are also given support and flexibility, which is often lacking in other work settings.

To help sustain the Community Action Training program and create opportunities for as many community members as possible, CFCs are strongly encouraged to consider setting term limits on how long someone can work in the Advocacy Office. To this end, positions are offered as one- to two-year (maximum) contracts. This gives the advocate adequate time to learn the position, gain on-the-job experience, and make a solid plan (with the support of the coordinator) for next steps after their contract ends. Whatever the terms, clarifying expectations at the outset is vital.

If it is within an organization's budget and capacity, continuity can be provided by hiring one or more former advocates as mentors to work alongside new advocates, providing hands-on training and support during their first few months in the Advocacy Office. They can also manage information systems like filing cabinets, bulletin boards, and email accounts.

SOCIAL JUSTICE CLUBS

The goal of the Community Action Program social justice club is to create a casual and accessible space where community members can meet new people, learn about different social movements, and strategize how to take action on local issues.

Many people who participate in Community Action Training often join the Community Food Centre's social justice club since it's a natural extension of their training and a way to build on what they've learned. Other people find out about the club through another CFC program, community agency, or even a poster or flyer on a community bulletin board.

The level of emphasis placed on whether club members are required to have a lived experience of poverty differs from program to program. Some programs have moved away from including "allies" — people who do not have such experience — or place limits on how many are in the group because they found that their voices and agendas tended to dominate. These programs see the space they create as one that is uniquely supportive of those who otherwise feel marginalized in their communities. Still others find it helpful to include these allies, because of the skills and social capital that they can bring.

Regardless of approach, some group dynamics may require management by coordinators and groups. For example, a middle-class white woman may be a longtime social activist with good intentions, but she may not be aware of her privileged position and how her bias and assumptions influence her behaviour and actions. To avoid or minimize any tension or conflict, it is recommended that the coordinator, possibly joined by other

ADVOCACY OFFICE: COMMUNITY HELPING COMMUNITY

Advocates may do a lot of referring and systems navigation, but it's not unusual for success to be the result of a grassroots community-driven response. One particularly impassioned example hails from The Alex Community Food Centre in Calgary. Peer advocates were in the midst of their Community Action Training program when they met with a couple who were living nearby in their van. Instead of referring them to a housing agency where they would simply be placed on a waiting list, the advocates shared their general story with the couple's network and secured a micro-loan from community members who were interested in supporting people in crisis. The funds enabled them to find suitable housing via the private market. The couple then qualified for a security deposit through a neighbouring grassroots agency. When their van needed some repairs and their dog was sick, the advocates connected them with a local mechanic and veterinarian who also wanted to support those in need of help. Peer advocates at The Alex are now applying for a catalyst grant to build on this idea of providing micro-loans for emergencies and creating a directory of supports for community members in need of assistance. It's a wonderful story of how community action can really work when people are fired up and well-informed.

Campaign best practices

Incorporate the following fundamental practices as part of all Community Food Centre campaign work:

Participatory decision-making: Participants who are involved in the planning, decision-making, and execution stages of a campaign feel an increased sense of ownership, tend to participate more consistently, and produce campaign strategies that are more creative and a true reflection of the community's desires for change.

Basic skills and training: Many community members don't have direct experience in community organizing or campaigning. Training sessions and workshops on campaign planning, public speaking, door-knocking, and outreach are necessary to give people the confidence and skill set to participate effectively.

Food access: Good food makes people's participation in community organizing possible. When planning meetings and actions can't be scheduled around food programs, try to offer a snack or pre-packed lunch.

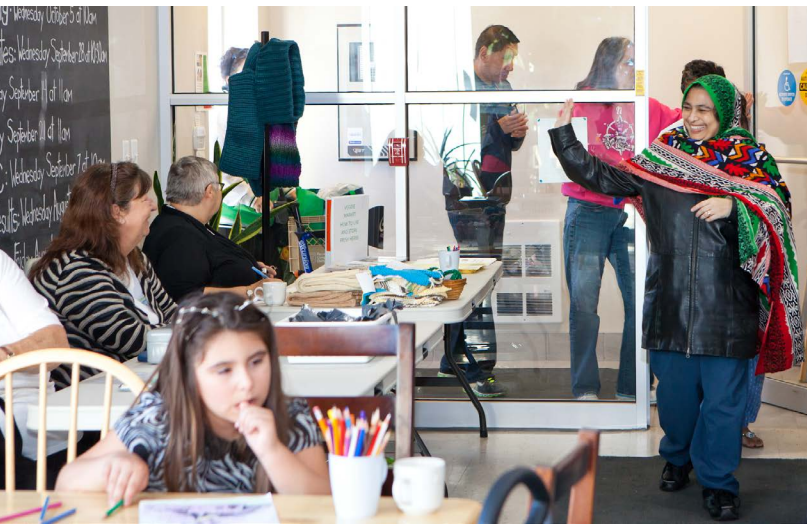
group members, spend some time in advance talking to prospective members to ensure they understand how to be a good ally and that they have the empathy and compassion to understand how their privilege can play out in a group who has many members that live in poverty. Having these discussions in advance will hopefully nurture mutual respect and trust within the group regardless of socioeconomic differences.

When it comes to making decisions in a social justice club, CAP programs often use a consensus-based model. This model tends to be unfamiliar to most people, especially those who have no experience working with a collective or non-hierarchical group. Most people are used to voting; while this is a quick way to make a decision that rules in favour of what most people want, it can also lead to divisions in a group. Those who were not part of the majority vote can become frustrated or disinterested, as their decisions and thoughts are not reflected in the group's actions. A consensus-based model is more conducive to long-term community building, and it also helps people learn and practice skills that are part of building inclusive and respectful communities. Having said all that, this process can be tedious and frustrating.

While a consensus-based approach is used to determine where group members will focus their advocacy efforts, another layer of decision-making exists. CFC social justice clubs walk a line between being autonomous and being subject to the CFC's determinations of whether an action is acceptable or not. CFCs believe that low-income community members should be the leaders in initiatives to fight poverty, which means having the power to make decisions about their direction, initiatives, and campaigns. However, it's the CFC who writes the grants that fund the group, provides the meeting space, and offers the coordinator's time to help with facilitation and coordinating related campaigns and events. Ultimately, the CFC has a responsibility to its funders and needs to protect its reputation and charitable status. While CFCs are transparent about this power and their responsibility, they are also conscious of giving each group autonomy. Ultimately this relationship is a balancing act, and one that's not always comfortable.

To help facilitate this balancing act, CAP coordinators use a number of strategies in an effort to encourage community member participation in organizational decision-making. CFC staff regularly invite community members to meetings with program funders. In fact, the original advocacy project at The Stop would not have secured funding had it not been for the passionate voices of community members who impressed funders at an initial meeting.

From time to time, ideas are brought forward from a social justice club that staff or management feel might be harmful to the organization's reputation or charitable status. This is when conversation is needed to ensure the group understands how their relationship with the CFC works. Of course there is nothing stopping a social justice club from becoming completely autonomous should they decide on this direction. That said, the limits placed on them tend not to be overly restrictive, and to date none of the social justice clubs have opted out because of a CFC's imposed restrictions.



Situating a Community Action Program within a bustling centre makes it easy to recruit participants to CAP while also integrating social justice work into other programs.

Tips for running a social justice club

- Make food available or schedule around mealtimes (for example, meet before or after community meals, put aside food from community meals for the group, or even prepare meals together).
- Whenever possible, cover the costs of transportation and provide for childcare.
- Use anti-oppression principles to inform the approach of group participation.
- Be aware of and respond to different literacy levels, language barriers, and people's ability to sit still for long periods of time.
- Ensure guest speakers reflect the diversity of the community and have lived experience of the issues you are engaging with.
- Consider varying levels of commitment within the group and create engagement opportunities that work for everyone.
- Schedule adequate time to enjoy a meal, to travel to events and meetings, and for people to talk about what is going on in their lives.
- Meet fairly frequently and on a consistent day and time once a week or at minimum once a month.
- Do outreach in existing programs using flyers, one-on-one conversations, and announcements.
- Meet in an accessible, quiet space.
- Create a social space where participants are encouraged to engage in conversation.
- Organize group activities that highlight local issues. Include everything from discussing a newspaper article, watching short videos, and hosting a guest speaker from a campaign or activist group.
- Celebrate as much as you can!

VOTER POP-UP – DARTMOUTH NORTH

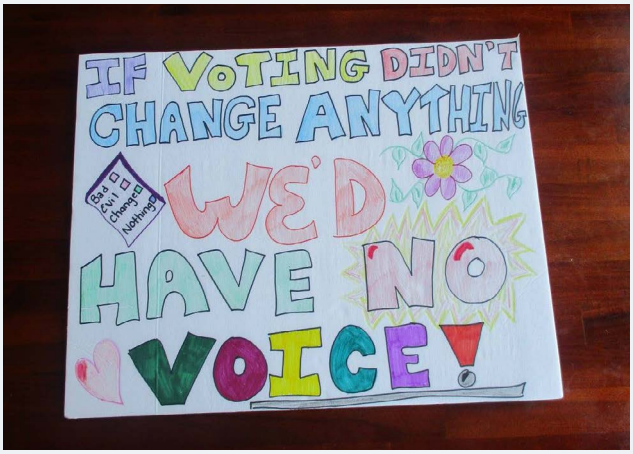
The community of Dartmouth North in Nova Scotia experiences a voter turnout that is eight to nine times lower than surrounding communities. In fact, during the last by-election not a single ballot was cast in two Dartmouth North polls where more than 1,000 voters live.

In response, Dartmouth North Community Food Centre decided to organize an eight-week pop-up campaign called Speak Up, Show Up in attempt to engage more people in exercising their democratic right to vote. The campaign ended with a voting party and parade.

The Speak Up, Show Up, campaign was organized by graduates of CFC's Community Action Training program, where participants were asked what matters to them and why voting is important. The goal, of course, was to encourage more people to show up at the polls come election time.

Participants' responses were showcased at the CFC and their voices were amplified through local newspapers and social media. The campaign offered community members a fun and creative way to demystify the voting process, whether confirming their registration information, explaining acceptable forms of identification and the five Ws — who, what, where, when, why — of voting, or practicing to cast a ballot.

Dartmouth North's voter pop-up was an affordable and easy-to-coordinate activity that didn't require a lot of resources or time. Dozens of people participated, many of whom had not voted in the past. Community members had the opportunity to meet politicians and candidates, and many members expressed a new or renewed interest in voting. As a result, voter turnout increased by over 7% in their riding.



BASIC INCOME CONSULTATIONS: HAMILTON AND REGENT PARK

In 2016, the Ontario government announced that it would be conducting a basic income pilot. In spring 2017, Hugh Segal released a basic income proposal, and two months later the Ontario government began conducting community consultations asking the community to weigh in on the design features of the basic income pilot. Community Food Centres in Hamilton and Toronto's Regent Park engaged their communities in an independent consultation. Both saw an excellent turnout of progressive basic income guarantee supporters, demonstrating the value of these programs in providing a pathway to policy arenas that can be difficult for low-income communities to access.

HOUSING OUTREACH PROJECT

In 2016, the social justice club at The Table Community Food Centre in Perth, ON, embarked on an ambitious participatory action research project aimed at identifying housing issues and developing local solutions.

Funded through Lanark County's Homelessness Prevention Strategy, the project included community members who are dealing with housing issues and homelessness.

The project focused on engaging and empowering people with lived experience to take action on their own behalf and used a variety of methods, including surveys and focus groups, to get community members to share their experiences and challenges related to housing. Participants involved in the research received funding for transportation, gift cards, and an honorarium for their time.

Thanks to The Table's Housing Outreach Campaign, three community groups have formed and members are taking action and seeking local solutions for issues they identified as a priority: more rent-geared-to-income housing (a type of housing subsidy); treating mould in housing; and reducing incidents of speeding on a specific street.

RELATED RESOURCES

Income supports
(Appendix A)

Sample Advocacy Office brochure
(Appendix B)

Sample peer advocate job posting
(Appendix D)

Sample peer advocate interview questions
(Appendix E)

Sample Community Action Training curriculum outline
(Appendix H)


Welcome
to the
NORTH
Collect a
recipe card
at every
Station
Market
Table


the BASIC
INCOME
PILOT is
great!


Campaign Events
12
Days until our Voting Party & Parade
Saturday October 15 at 9AM
E-voting & Voter Par ning: Wednesday October 12 at 10:30am
Elections Buffet ing: Wednesday October 5 at 10am
COMMUNITY
ACTION
PROGRAM

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Community Action Program (CAP) coordinator is a paid full-time staff member of the Community Food Centre (CFC) who is typically responsible for managing and facilitating all aspects of the Community Action Program, including all Community Action Training (CAT), the Advocacy Office, and the social justice club. Within the CFC setting, it is quite common for the coordinator to be responsible for managing CFC volunteers as well.

When it comes to the Community Action Training, CAP coordinators promote the program, select the participants, determine the course outline and curriculum, organize the speakers, and facilitate the learning sessions — though in many cases community members are also involved in supporting these processes. The CAP coordinator's role in the social justice club often includes facilitating meetings and helping to coordinate events and advocacy campaigns. In this capacity, the coordinator also works to ensure that the group follows a consensus-based approach to decision-making and that the activities of the group are within the organization's acceptable limits of political activity.

CAP coordinators operate and supervise the Advocacy Office, which includes offering the advocates support and guidance on more difficult cases, and ensuring professional and respectful conduct is always maintained. Coordinators are also responsible for scheduling and compensating the advocates and managing the Advocacy Office budget.

Many of the advocates have long personal histories of marginalization, and have often endured ongoing hardships and chaos in their lives, not to the mention the toxic stress that results from living in poverty. Health problems, evictions, mental health crises, family problems, even deportations and incarcerations are realities that may require the support and guidance of the CAP coordinator. As a result, the coordinator sometimes walks the murky line between social worker and supervisor.

The coordinator models how to respectfully respond to community members looking for help. This includes taking the time to listen, doing research and presenting options, and following through on commitments. It also means respecting the self-determination of the community member. Similarly, the coordinator always tries to be open and patient with the advocates when approached for support, whether an advocate is dealing with personal issue or crisis for themselves or on behalf of someone they are working with.

Advocates are more likely to develop resiliency when they can build strong relationships and look to each other for support rather than turning to the coordinator whenever an issue arises. The coordinator encourages and supports the mutual aid bonds that form between the advocates by creating space for social time, such as sharing a meal or taking a field trip, and referring to their expertise when handling issues.

The coordinator clearly defines expectations through consultation with the advocates, and implements procedures for dealing with situations where expectations are not met (for example, when an advocate repeatedly misses meetings or shows up late for shifts).

The coordinator listens to advocates and provides the supports and resources they need. Sometimes this means organizing training opportunities so they can learn about topics like housing, legal aid, and mental health; bringing in facilitators on topics such as self-care, communication skills, or conflict resolution to help them cope with the stress of their roles; or researching and developing a list of free and local counselling services so advocates can connect with a therapist to help them deal with personal issues, if needed.

CAP recruitment strategies

- Set up a drop-in or meal program to attract participants.
- Promote your program to partner organizations serving marginalized communities.
- Outreach through other community meal programs.
- Encourage word-of-mouth advertising by CAT graduates, clients of the Advocacy Office, and the social justice club.
- Seek and encourage internal referrals from CFC team members running other programs.

RELATED RESOURCES

CAP coordinator job description
(Appendix C)


Community
Action


Good Food Should
be taught in Schools
#HungryForChange

ADVOCACY AND CHARITABLE STATUS

For many not-for-profit organizations, advocacy may seem like a dangerous word, in part because of the fear of running afoul of Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) regulations. This fear is not completely unfounded, given some attempts to punish environmental organizations for their advocacy work by removing their charitable status in recent years. However, the effects of this has been disproportionate, given that charities have always been allowed to do advocacy or "political activity" related to an organization's mission as long as it is non-partisan and does not use up more than 10% of an organization's budget.

Recently, opportunities for advocacy have increased, having been acknowledged by the Canadian government as a legitimate activity. In May 2017, the federal government announced it would suspend audits devoted to assessing a charity's advocacy activities. The government is considering allowing charities to fully engage in unlimited non-partisan public policy dialogue and development as long as it relates to their organization's purpose. They are also considering eliminating the current political activity limit of 10% of a charitable organization's resources.

The fear surrounding advocacy is also compounded by the way charitable organizations and non-profits are funded. Little funding tends to be unrestricted (i.e. not tied to a specific program/project), and the potential funders for advocacy are limited.

As charities increasingly look to private donors (individuals, corporations, and foundations), they may not find much sympathy for programs that are seeking greater equality and fairness in our socioeconomic systems. However, these obstacles can and should be challenged by making a strong case for the value of the work and by seeking out funders who understand the complexity of and need for community-based organizing aimed at empowerment and social change.

It is still prudent for non-profits to be cautious about their actions in order to protect their organization; however, avoiding action altogether can be an abdication of responsibility to pursue positive systemic change for the people an organization serves. If an organization is still operating under the premise that they could "get into trouble" for speaking out on poverty or food insecurity, it is definitely time to re-examine the current legislation and practices of the Canada Revenue Agency.

Challenging the political and economic forces that keep people living in poverty is a key part of a Community Food Centre's work. Yes, some of it is non-partisan political advocacy, but there are also lots of other ways in which a CAP challenges inequality: through popular education, capacity-building, and the one-on-one peer advocacy that happens in the Advocacy Office. This work is made possible by progressive funding and also by building a culture within the organization where staff across programs and functions, as well as the organization's board, are hired partly on the basis of their understanding and support for the full mission of the organization (including civic engagement and social justice).

RELATED RESOURCES

CRA policy statement on charities engaged in political activities
(www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/policies-guidance/policy-statement-022-political-activities.html)


STOP


HOUSING

EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

This section provides an overview of best practices and guidelines for evaluating Community Action Programs (CAPs).

WHY EVALUATE?

There are two primary reasons for evaluating your CAP:

Improving: Evaluation helps an organization continuously strengthen its programs. Ask questions such as: How well are we achieving our objectives? What can we do better?

Proving: The process of evaluation demonstrates the value of programs to key internal and external audiences. What is the change a program creates for participants? Why does this matter?

TYPES OF EVALUATION INFORMATION

An evaluation can answer the following types of questions regarding program outputs, and outcomes, as well as participant feedback on the program overall.

OUTPUTS

Outputs are the numerical data we collect about programs that provide information about the level of activity that's taking place. Evaluation questions to collect output data include:

- How many advocacy training sessions were run?
- How many trainees graduated?
- How many external agencies presented during the training?
- How many community advocates were hired after training?
- How many people have visited the Advocacy Office over the past year?
- How many referrals were provided?
- How many people signed the petition that was introduced in the social justice club?

OUTCOMES

Outcomes are short- to medium-term changes that people experience as a result of participating in programs. We collect outcome indicators to answer questions about the difference programs make for Community Action trainees, visitors to the Advocacy Office, advocates, social justice club members, and other stakeholders. Evaluation questions to collect information about outcomes include:

- Has confidence among Community Action trainees increased?
- Have trainees begun to contextualize their own experience differently because of an increased recognition of the connections between problems faced in their own lives and wider conditions?
- Have feelings of guilt and stigma that are commonly associated with poverty been reduced?
- Do advocates feel more empowered to take action on the wider systemic issues that impact their lives?
- Have advocates gained new skills?
- Have advocates been able to access new employment opportunities as a result of the experience they've gained working in the Advocacy Office?
- Have visitors to the Advocacy Office received helpful supports on the issues they were facing and has their current situation improved as a result?

FEEDBACK

Feedback from program participants, advocates, and other relevant stakeholders is essential in order to assess how programs can be improved to maximize impact. Sample questions to collect feedback include:

- What are we doing well?
- Where can we improve?
- What specific changes can we make so we can better meet participant needs and achieve our program objectives?

Feedback can be gathered in a formal manner using one of the evaluation tools described below or in a more informal manner through casual conversation or a fun, participatory exercise such as a mock gameshow. The important thing is to encourage participants to provide honest, critical feedback and to let them know that their input is valued.

EVALUATION METHODS

There are countless ways to perform an evaluation. A Community Action Program typically uses a number of different tools, each designed to gather a specific type of information. The following evaluation tools have been used in CAPs and other Community Food Centre programs.

DAILY PROGRAM TRACKING SYSTEMS

When: On an ongoing basis
Who: Program staff

It is important to document daily program activity and statistics, such as the number of volunteers and volunteer hours, the number of advocates and hours worked, the different issues covered in a social justice club, and the number of participants at a civic engagement event. The exact systems used to track this information will differ depending on an organization's capacity, available resources, and preference. Documentation methods can range from a paper system with daily program logs that coordinators fill in and keep in a binder to an online electronic database system. Whichever method is used, information must be collected in a way that can be easily logged, digested, and reported.

CLIENT FILES

When: On an ongoing basis
Who: Advocates, with input from Advocacy Office clients

A client file system is an important tool for the Advocacy Office. It ensures a record is kept of each person who visits the office, tracking the issues each client is facing and the types of support provided. It also ensures each client receives continuity of support whenever they visit.

CASE REVIEWS

When: Periodic
Who: Information is shared between advocates; facilitated by program staff

Given that community members are supported by multiple advocates rather than assigned to a single individual, it's important to capture the collective knowledge about the outcomes of supports provided to each community member who uses the Advocacy Office. It should be made clear to advocates that their ability to recall and document important outcomes is essential for capturing the value of the Community Action Program. Staff members should take every opportunity to build an evaluative culture among advocates, such as providing regular reminders and offering training opportunities when possible.

Case reviews can be done both casually during regular advocate meetings and in a more structured way through periodic file review sessions. Remember: the review will only be as good as the information the advocates capture about issues, support provided, and outcomes both in the file during visits and through follow-up conversations.

According to CFCC's 2016 survey of CFC Advocacy Office clients...

91%
said the Advocacy Office helped them resolve an issue

80%
received information about programs, services, or supports

70%
accessed programs, services, or supports

WRITTEN SURVEYS

When: At the end of Community Action Training (CAT) sessions or on an annual basis in an ongoing program such as a social justice club or advocacy program
Who: CAT trainees, social justice club members, advocates; administered by program staff or online using software such as Survey Monkey (if internet is accessible to the majority of stakeholders in a target group)

Written surveys can gather uniform information across a large sample of people and can be relatively easy to administer. They're a good way to get answers to close-ended questions — that is, questions involving a yes/no response. Surveys are less helpful for capturing good stories and quotes. It's helpful for written surveys to remain anonymous so people feel comfortable providing honest feedback. When creating the survey, don't forget to consider the literacy level of the participants. If you have concerns about literacy levels, you could respectfully offer participants the option of completing the survey verbally.

VERBAL INTERVIEWS

When: Annually or biannually
Who: Service users and advocates; administered by an external interviewer or evaluation consultant

Verbal interviews are useful for capturing in-depth qualitative information through open-ended questions and additional probing. It helps to conduct interviews in a quiet, private space and to use experienced interviewers or provide adequate training to interviewers before the process begins. Unless a community member provides specific consent to share their story, ensure any personal details that could be used to identify service users in the Advocacy Office (for example, name, specific case) are removed from interview documentation.

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

When: Annually or biannually
Who: Advocates at a meeting or Community Action Program trainees at the last training session; administered by program staff or an evaluation consultant

Another tool for gathering stories of program impacts is called "most significant change," which involves asking a probing question that is time-bound and focused on one specific domain of change. For example: "Since you became an advocate, what is the most important change in the way that you think about or approach the issues that you face in your own life?" or "Over the past __ weeks we've been together, what has been the most important change for you as a result of participating in the Community Action Training?" Participants are provided with sufficient time to answer the question in written format on a cue card, which they then read out to all those participating, who collectively group the results according to themes that emerge. This method is excellent for identifying shared and unique outcomes of a program, and often provides unexpected results.

RELATED RESOURCES

Advocacy Office evaluation (for visitors and advocates)
(Appendix F)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document is the product of many contributors.

Our sincerest thanks goes out to Jennifer Danch for writing an early draft of this manual based on her experience coordinating the first Community Action Program at The Stop Community Food Centre.

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20: Snickerdoodle, CFCC staff, The Table staff, Snickerdoodle
22: Snickerdoodle, Loree, Loree
24: CFCC staff, Regent Park staff, Snickerdoodle, Snickerdoodle

INCOME SUPPORTS

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

Income is one of the most profound determinants of health. Increasing a person's income is one of the best ways to improve a person's social and health outcomes. The following strategies are targeted toward making life more affordable either through accessing entitlements to income benefits, discretionary funds, or program subsidies for low-income Canadians.

Peer advocates can play a significant role helping low-income community members access such resources.

This document outlines the most common ways they can do so.

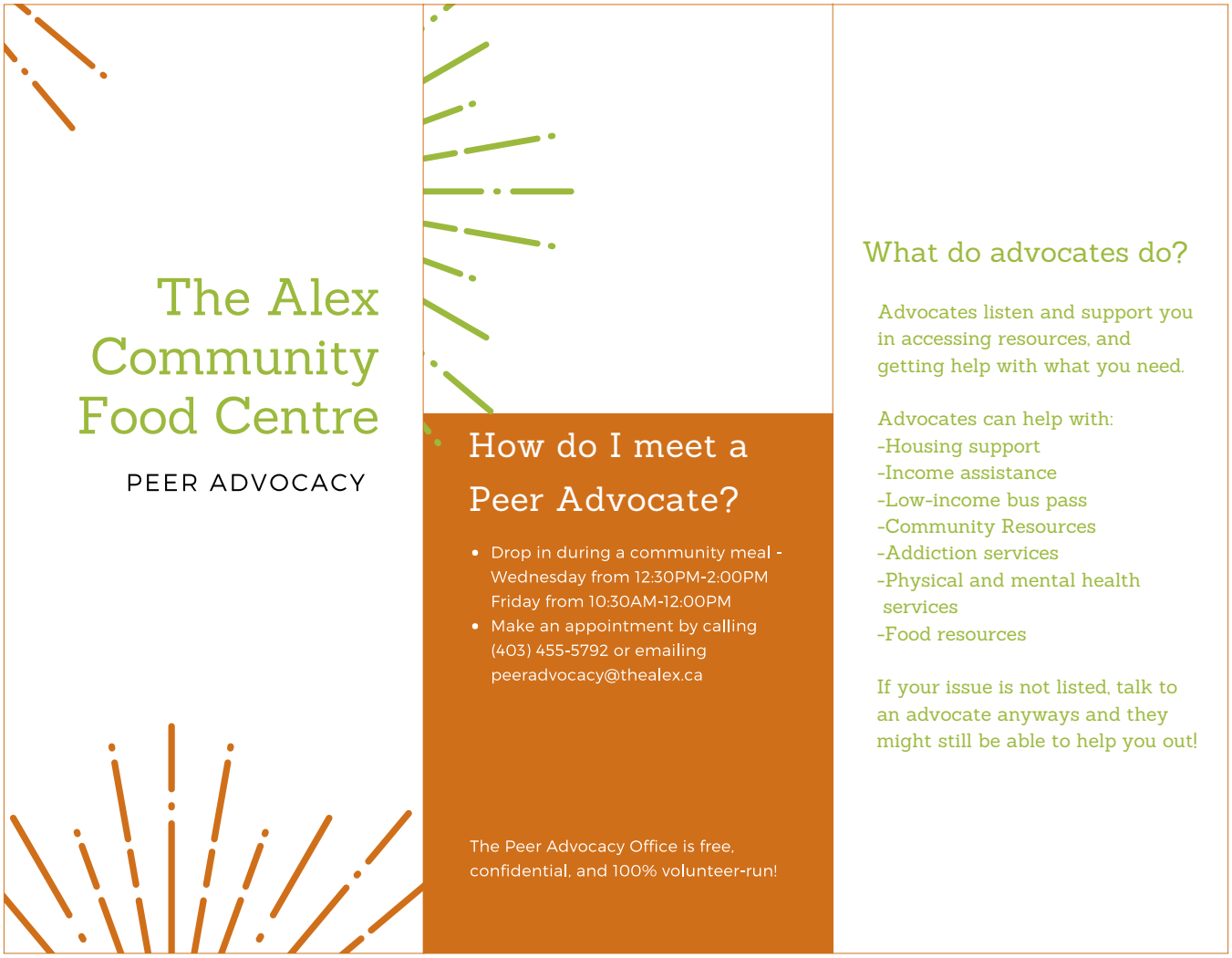
It covers:
- transitioning from welfare to disability support
- transit subsidies
- special diet allowance
- payment for volunteer work while on social assistance
- filing taxes
- provincial income supports
- federal income supports

DOWNLOAD

Download this and other appendices at:
www.tinyurl.com/CAPmanual

SAMPLE ADVOCACY OFFICE BROCHURE

SOURCE: THE ALEX COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE



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SAMPLE CAP COORDINATOR JOB DESCRIPTION

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

Reports to:

Program Director

Position summary

The Community Action Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of the Community Action Program, including the daily operation of the Advocacy Office and supporting systemic advocacy initiatives at broader levels. The coordinator collaborates with all of the peer advocates and the staff in the volunteer, civic engagement, and other related programs.

Responsibilities

- Coordinate the team of advocates including scheduling, honoraria, meeting facilitation, and ongoing educational/training opportunities
- Provide support and act as a resource to the advocates in their casework with community members
- Provide direct casework support to community members including: advocacy, assessment, supportive counselling, crisis intervention, and brief case management when required
- Work with the advocates and community members to identify areas for strategic systemic action and develop campaigns and initiatives to address these injustices
- Network and build connections with other agencies and activist groups to support both the casework and systemic work being done by the program
- Provide support and supervision to students and volunteers working with the program
- Develop and coordinate future advocacy training programs for community members
- Track and document the progress of the program through data collection and statistics

General

- Establish and/or represent the organization on networks, coalitions, and other partnerships dealing with community and organizational issues
- Attend staff meetings and other meetings related to the Community Action Coordinator portfolio
- Meet with the Program Director on a regular basis to discuss issues related to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Community Action Program
- Develop funding proposals, coordinate program evaluation processes, and write reports to funders as required
- Participate in broader activities at the agency: planning, fundraising, special events, and team-building

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SAMPLE PEER ADVOCATE JOB POSTING

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

The following is a sample job posting for the peer advocate positions. These important people work at the Advocacy Office, providing support and referrals to people on issues ranging from social assistance and disability benefits to housing, legal aid to immigration, and much, much more.

ABC Organization strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds community and challenges inequality. ABC Organization's Community Action Program aims to increase community members' access to information and services while also laying the ground work for grassroots justice initiatives.

We are looking for a maximum of five graduates from the Community Action Training Program to help operate the Advocacy office and provide support, referrals, and advocacy to fellow community members. Advocates will participate in, and be organizers of, neighbourhood initiatives to challenge the root causes of poverty and make systemic change.

Community Advocates will be required to:

- Co-run the advocacy office for a minimum of two shifts/month and attend monthly meeting (approx. 10 hours)
- Work with community members to help them access basic rights and services
- Provide information on a range of community resources
- Take a leadership role in future campaigns and initiatives to confront injustice
- Participate in regular team meetings
- Act as a rotating representative of the Community Action Program on a number of committees (e.g. social justice club and relevant external partner networks)
- Maintain organized records in the Advocacy Office
- Facilitate and take minutes at social justice club meetings
- Represent the organization in the community

Skills needed to be a Community Advocate include:

- Successful completion of the Community Action Training program
- Demonstrated interest in community work and helping others
- Understanding of and commitment to anti-oppression and social justice
- Familiarity with community resources in the areas of income supports, housing, harm reduction, immigration, mental health, employment, and family violence
- Basic skills for engagement, providing emotional support, and responding to crisis
- Ability to use a computer and the internet (or willingness to learn)
- Ability to act professionally and protect confidentiality at all times
- A second language is an asset

Community Advocate positions are highly-skilled volunteer positions. However, Advocates will be compensated for their time through honoraria.

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SAMPLE COMMUNITY ADVOCATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SOURCE: REGENT PARK COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

Interviewee Name: _____

The peer advocate position is a part-time, one year contract position with the following job responsibilities:

- Co-run the Advocacy Office and be available for 5 two-hour shifts per month
- Provide one-on-one support to community members visiting the Advocacy Office
- Coordinate the social justice club meetings (8 month rotation)
- Attend other committee meetings including the Regent Park Advocacy Committee meetings, plus team meetings and bi-weekly supervision

1. Tell us a little about yourself.

2. What attracted you to this position?

3. How would you describe this neighbourhood to someone who is not familiar with it?

4. Can you describe your experience and your approach to helping people from backgrounds different from your own?

6. Can you describe a social justice or advocacy activity you've been involved in, and how you contributed to it?

7. Give an example of when you took initiative or leadership in completing a project or task. What skills did you use to get the project/task completed?

8. As part of this position, you will be providing referrals and supports to other community members related to health care, housing, legal rights, income supports, and other social services. What resources would you draw on from the neighbourhood and across the city to help with this?

9. What do you expect from the Community Action Coordinator, who will be supervising you? What do you expect from your staff team of peer advocates?

10. Do you have a particular asset that you believe gives you an edge in being considered for this position?

12. (Scenario) How would you handle a participant being harassed by another participant?

13. (Scenario) You have been supporting a drop-in participant (call her Jane) in getting access to a lawyer and some other supports. At first, Jane attended all of your scheduled meetings in the Advocacy Office, but then suddenly, she stopped showing up. You have been able to contact her by phone, however she is evasive and won't give a reason for missing appointments. One day as you are arriving to the office, another drop-in participant that you don't know well makes a point of coming to tell you that Jane has started using drugs again and they think you should not be helping her because now she's not trustworthy and there are other people you could be helping during that time.
Break down for us all the steps you'd take to address the issues from this scenario as you see them.

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ADVOCACY OFFICE EVALUATION (FOR VISITORS AND ADVOCATES)

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

QUESTIONS FOR VISITORS TO THE ADVOCACY OFFICE

These questions can be posed to visitors of the Advocacy Office via an anonymous written survey or through an interview with an external evaluator:

1. Approximately how many times have you visited the Advocacy Office this year?
2. How did you first hear about the Advocacy Office?
3. Has visiting the Advocacy Office helped you to resolve an issue or issues that you were facing in your life? Yes / No
4. Have you ever received information about other programs, services, or supports in the community from the pper advocates? Yes / No
   - If yes: What type of program, service, or support did you learn about?
   - Did you end up accessing that program, service, or support? Yes / No
     - If yes: Did you access it on your own or did the Advocates help you to do that? On own / Advocates helped
     - If peer advocates helped: How exactly did they help you?

Please circle the response that best reflects your feelings about each of the following statements:

5. I felt comfortable asking questions and sharing my issues with Community Advocates.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. I felt like the Community Advocates understood my issues.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. The Community Advocates were knowledgeable about community supports and solutions to address my issues.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. What is the most important difference that receiving support from the Community Advocates has made for you?

QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY ADVOCATES:

These questions can be posed to Community Advocates via an anonymous written survey, a focus group, an interview with an external evaluator:

1. Why did you first decide to become a peer advocate?
2. What is the most important difference that being an Advocate has made in your life?
3. If you were in charge of the Community Action Program at the Community Food Centre, what would you change to better meet the needs of community members?
4. What would you change about the program to make it easier for you and other peer advocates to do your job?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

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SAMPLE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

SOURCE: COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION Community Action Program		**TARGET POPULATION** Low-income community members	**PROGRAM OBJECTIVES** 1. To increase skills and connections to a variety of resources and supports within the community to allow community members to support each other more effectively in facing and overcoming challenges. 2. To increase knowledge of poverty and food system issues and create inclusive opportunities for effective action on these issues. 3. To mobilize community members to work together to take effective grassroots action on poverty, social justice, and food system issues impacting their lives.		
PROGRAMS	**INPUTS** Resources We Invest	**ACTIVITIES** What we do	**OUTPUTS** Numbers we count in our program to tell us about the level of activity.	**OUTCOMES** Short-term changes in learning (knowledge, skills, awareness, etc.) and medium-term changes in action (behaviour, practice, etc.)	**INDICATORS** Things we measure to determine how well we are achieving our outcomes.
Community Action Training (CAT) **Community Advocacy Office**	• Community Action Coordinator • Volunteers • Participants • Welcoming space and supplies for training • Training curriculum • Private rooms for consultation • Healthy meals or snacks	• Offer Community Action Training to interested community members with lived experience of poverty that links local challenges to wider systemic issues and enables them to be effective advocates for themselves and their neighbours • Hired trained community members to work as peer advocates in the Community Advocacy Office and provide information, referrals and other supports to community members	• # of unique participants in CAT • # of training sessions • # of peer advocates hired • Number of unique visitors to the Advocacy Office • # of visits to the Advocacy Office (participant contacts) • # and types of referrals made to external community supports • # of other types of supports provided • # of advocate hours • # of volunteers	• Social isolation reduced • Increased advocacy capacity and leadership skills • Increased knowledge of and interest in poverty and social justice issues • Greater sense of self-efficacy to influence issues that affect individuals and their neighbourhood • Increased ability for participants to contextualize their own experience • Increased leadership among program participants • Stronger connection to a variety of supports • Increased levels of civic engagement • Improved mental health	• New friendships made in CFC programs • Increased sense of community belonging • Improved advocacy and leadership skills • New knowledge gained about community supports and services, poverty, and social justice issues • Participants report having greater interest in community issues • Greater feelings of self-efficacy on individual and community issues • # of successful referrals
Social justice club (SJC) **Public awareness events and campaigns**	• Community Advocacy Coordinator • Volunteers • Program participants • Community members • Welcoming space and supplies • Healthy meals or snacks	• Hold regular social justice clubs where effective actions are identified, planned and carried out to address systemic issues that negatively impact the lives of community members • Launch and contribute to larger political and social justice campaigns • Create a variety of levels of involvement and provide necessary material and support supports • Create mechanisms to encourage participant involvement and identify leadership opportunities for community members across program areas	• # of unique participants in SJC • # of SJC sessions • #of education and engagement events held, and number of attendees • # of civic engagement activities led (e.g. petitions, social media or letter-writing campaign) and number of people who took part • # of volunteers		

ASSUMPTIONS Principles, beliefs, ideas behind how and why the interventions will work in our community

- Stronger, healthier communities are better able to stand up for their rights, build alternatives, and create change.
- People who are connected and informed create stronger and therefore healthier communities.
- Engaging in participatory, grassroots social movements leads to individual transformation.
- Creating change involves building local alternatives.

EXTERNAL CONDITIONS Factors outside the program's control that influence it (e.g. economy, education, culture).

- Political and public will to create change
- Social stresses and marginalization occurring in participants' personal lives
- Policy changes

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SAMPLE COMMUNITY ACTION TRAINING CURRICULUM

SOURCE: DARTMOUTH NORTH COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE, THE TABLE COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

Week	Topic
1	**How we learn; group guidelines** • Understanding the ways we each learn • Establishing a set of group guidelines to abide by throughout the series
2	**ABCs of advocacy** • What advocacy means, what it looks like in practice, and more importantly, how to do the work • Exploring best practices and guidelines that will help you to develop a well thought out campaign
3	**Food security and social determinants of health (SDOH)** • Identifying what food security means to each of us, defining the terms, and looking at examples • Identifying SDOH and the role food insecurity plays in it
4	**Food resources in the community** • Identifying local food resources and what people's experiences are with those resources and spaces
5	**Strength-based and deficit-based approaches** • Defining and understanding different community development approaches to working with people and community organizations
6	**Effective leadership and communication** • Understanding the ingredients of a great leader and applying two tools that make a leader better: self-reflection and self-assessment • Communication styles and their role in community work
7	**Mental health and wellness** • Defining terms and exploring the mental health continuum model • How to create space for those in the community with diverse mental health needs
8	**Laws and rights** • Identifying the different levels of government and how we interact with each one • Understanding laws, rights, and benefits that affect people in our communities
9	**Power and privilege** • Defining and understanding power, privilege, and anti-oppression; how to be effective allies
10	**Managing conflict** • Understanding how conflict arises and how to effectively navigate challenging interactions
11	**Social justice movements** • Historical examples of the challenges, successes, and stories of social justice movements • Drawing lessons for developing campaigns in our own communities
12	**Self-care; graduation** • Understanding the importance of self-care in advocacy work; tools to stay grounded • Wrap up, final check-in, next steps

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HOW TO START A COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM
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Community Food Centres Canada builds health, belonging, and social justice in low-income communities across Canada through the power of food. CFCC also works with the broader food movement to build greater capacity for impact and to empower communities to work toward a healthy and fair food system.

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