

FoodShare

Innovated Access to food



Governance

FoodShare is comprised of a 13-member Board of Directors and 42 staff, including the Executive Director, Paul Taylor as well as an Indigenous Advisory Circle. The Advisory Circle helps guide FoodShare in any big picture work in which they are engaging, from their food justice or body positivity statements to their strategic plans. FoodShare ensures that Indigenous voices are heard and consulted with and works to decolonize the ways in which it works with Indigenous peoples on traditional Indigenous lands. The chair of FoodShare's board is an Indigenous activist – one of the founders of the Idle No More movement in Toronto. Thus, FoodShare's leadership team offers a bold step in the disruption of, as well as innovation in anti-poverty work.

Funding

Most of FoodShare's funding comes from its own social enterprise. While it receives money through grants, it is not reliant on government funding, as that does not come close to covering the cost of the five million people who experience food insecurity in Canada(3). Being self-sufficient allows FoodShare to speak up against government policies that have made food a commodity instead of a right. It also allows them to call on the government by recognizing that there is a need for its intervention and "push for public policies that help put more money into people's pockets so that they can buy the food that they want to buy" (4) Indeed then, access to good, nutrient dense and culturally appropriate food should not depend on how much money a person makes.

Innovative Access to Food

FoodShare is looking to increase access to fresh food to marginalized communities in innovative ways. One way they are doing this is through their social enterprise Good Food Box. Good Food Box is a program that delivers fresh and culturally diverse produce to families, schools, and restaurants. Revenue from sales goes back into the organization to support the work they do. In 2020, FoodShare's budget was \$11 million; \$2.7 millions of this was from government grants and the rest was from their Good Food Box program which not only earns revenue for the organization but works to fulfill its vision of "a Toronto where all people can feed themselves, their loved ones and their communities with dignity and joy" (5). For Taylor, this vision is the recognition that food is not only about nutrition, it's about the health of the community and it's about joy and dignity for all, not just those who can afford it, or who can get to a food bank. Dignity does not come from having food per se, but from having culturally appropriate and fresh food that is wanted; it does not come from somebody's leftovers, nor does it come from "food-like substances" (6). that are often found at food banks. It must also come from government policies that allow people to have access to fresh food on their own terms.



Food Justice at FoodShare

FoodShare is a food justice organization, working to recognize systemic inequities that cause some people to have more food than others and draw attention to those issues (7). FoodShare also works to make a system-wide impact, from farm to table, so to speak. Part of its food justice mission to "advocate for food justice by supporting community-based food initiatives and through ongoing advocacy and public education," (8) is working with local Black, farmers and supporting their organizations and communities. This work comes in many forms. It comes through partnerships with Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC) -led organizations in the production and distribution of their Good Food Box. As well as through Good Food Markets – open air produce markets that are community-based, "less white and more affordable." FoodShare works with the communities to set the markets up and the communities decide what food will be sold. Food is purchased from FoodShare, the money from which goes back into the organization. Good Food markets work under the premise that all people deserve fresh and culturally appropriate food, disrupting the idea that people who are experiencing food insecurity need to be satisfied and indebted for "someone else's leftovers, stale bread, salty soup or Starbucks muffins" (10).

In the summer of 2020, FoodShare introduced a program called the Dismantling White Supremacy Good Food Box, where all the produce for the boxes was purchased from BIPOC owned or led producers. FoodShare buys millions of pounds of produce each year; this initiative not only supports BIPOC organizations but recognizes that Black and Brown bodies are deeply involved in providing fresh food to families across Canada and are rarely recognized for their contributions to the food system.

Anti-Black Racism & Challenging White Supremacy

In their support of traditionally marginalized groups, who are often under-invested in, FoodShare is challenging white fragility and white universalism. The food security sector in Canada has many organizations doing good work, however a majority of these organizations have white people in positions of power:



They are designing and inventing initiatives that work very nicely for white folks but BIPOC folks – they're not working for us in the same way because we're not at the table of solution-finding. Whether it's public policy or in organizations like ours.(11)



There are several ways in which FoodShare is working to address white supremacy. Embedded in their values, FoodShare has taken a deep look at the ways in which white supremacy has manifested in their work. One example is in the compensation structure of the organization. FoodShare recognizes that generally, people with the highest level of education typically make the most money. Education though, is not always accessible in the same ways to everyone. Over a period of 4 years, the lowest paid workers have received a 29% increase in pay at FoodShare. Essential workers have received a \$4 increase since the beginning of the pandemic and 10 additional paid sick days. An emergency loan program has been established which allows workers to borrow up to \$2000 dollars, to be paid back on their own terms with the recognition that predatory lenders often prey on low-wage and racialized labourers. Over the same four years, the Executive Director at FoodShare has received a 2% wage increase. The compensation structure at FoodShare stipulates that the highest paid workers can make no more than 3.7 times the wage of the lowest paid workers, in acknowledgement that the leadership team is one piece to a larger team; this in turn ensures that the work of all people is acknowledged when the work of some is acknowledged and prevents further stratification between high and low-wage workers.



Another way that FoodShare is working to address white supremacy is through their Anti-Black Racism Plan. Arising from a colleague who experienced anti-Black racism, FoodShare has moved beyond training, establishing a Black Caucus and an action plan with accountability measures and deadlines. They are working towards becoming a living wage employer and relying less on short term work. 62% of Ontarians who are experiencing food insecurity describe their primary source of income as employment. Under-employment and lack of a living wage are contributors to poverty and food insecurity, and disproportionately so for racialized Canadians. Addressing food insecurity in Canada means addressing anti-Black racism at the institutional level, a national conversation to which FoodShare is contributing.



Challenging Stereotypes through Research

FoodShare's research is challenging the ways in which food insecurity is conceptualized. In partnership with Proof, an organization at the University of Toronto, FoodShare is conducting research that has not been done before, on the ways in which food insecurity disproportionality effects Black and other racialized communities. For instance, their research shows that Black households are 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white households and 36% of Black children versus 12% of White children lives in households who are experiencing food insecurity. Aggregate data shows that lone parent, racialized and immigrant people, along with renters are all more likely to be food insecure. What FoodShare found though, was that this data did not apply to Black people. Instead, the prevalence of food insecurity remains high for Black people, no matter what their status is. Research also found that food insecurity tends to drop in seniors because of an increase in guaranteed income through old age security. Again, this was not the case for Black people, who still experience food insecurity in their old age. Research found that for Black seniors, the prevalence of food insecurity remained high for a number of potential reasons. One reason may be because perhaps Black people have held jobs that have not paid as much as White people. It may also be because Black people may still be supporting dependents. It may also be because it was found that among those receiving social assistance, White people receive more than Black folks, Black folks are less likely to be approved for disability and when they are approved, receive less money than their White counterparts. Public policy must be depoliticized and advanced systematically through a human rights lens. Policies must address the issues that propel poverty – issues of housing, childcare, and education. With policies that promote universal childcare, affordable, non-market housing and equitable education comes more money for people to buy food with.



It's Not the Photos that Matter

Photo opportunities and recognition for the work that FoodShare is doing are happening more and more since the summer of George Floyd's murder in 2020. Perhaps that's because more people are ready to take up and engage with difficult conversations around anti-Black racism and anti-Indigeneity. FoodShare continues to ask tough questions, including those around leadership in the sector. While there are more and more people of colour in the pipeline for leadership positions, according to Taylor, there are still not enough. FoodShare is working to challenge White universalism, calling attention to the fact that many organizations in the sector are headed by White folks and that many times, there are only White leaders in the room. As a queer person of colour himself, Paul Taylor recognizes the systemic barriers faced by BIPOC people when it comes to positions of leadership and is willing to take some risks to accomplish change (12). While photo opportunities with politicians help in disseminating the work of FoodShare, Taylor recognizes that his experiences as a racialized person, and having experienced poverty himself, affects the work he does at FoodShare. He is not content to "shuffle tins around and have politicians in for photos" (13). There is an urgency in his work to dismantle the very systems of oppression he continues to experience. He recognizes too, the fundamental need to have people who are most effected work on the issues they are affected by and in this, he has recognized the work of Black women and their role in his success as a leader; the work of racialized women often gets erased in the promotion of men who do not recognize the work that has gotten them to a place of leadership.

Conclusion

FoodShare's commitment to fresh and culturally appropriate food as a right ensures the dignity of those accessing their programming. Its ground-breaking work around food insecurity begins with the notion that food insecurity is not about food, but about racism, and particularly about anti-Black racism and anti-Indigeneity. It is in this recognition that FoodShare's innovating research, advocacy work and programs work to dismantle and disrupt narratives of race and poverty that serve to uphold systemic inequality which disproportionately affects BIPOC communities.

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