



# Hamilton Hunger Count 2009

**Record numbers turn to our local food banks in 2009  
including 2,086 more children; a 33% increase over last year**

Hamilton's Hunger Count Survey is taken annually in the month of March. Similar to most food banks across our nation the increased need for emergency food rose to unprecedented levels. This year marked the largest increase ever recorded in food bank access in Hamilton. Local hunger relief agencies contended with the significant spike of increased need in a climate of shrinking resources. The depth of hunger in our community surpassed that of our provincial and national counterparts. Our survey recorded 19,602 people, a 26% increase over the previous year, 6% higher than the national average and 7% higher than provincial average.

Food Bank Access Comparison March 2009 to March 2008 Statistics		
	March 2009	March 2008
Adults	11,289	9,284
Children	8,313	6,227
Total People	19,602	15,511
Total Households	7,685	6,324

Food banks & hot meal programs continue to be the last resort, the only option for our neighbours who go hungry. Poverty is a complex issue and there is a myriad of reasons why people seek out the help of their local food bank.

Part-time and minimum wage employment replacing full time high earning jobs coupled with the high cost of utilities, market rent and increasing food costs erode the ability of low wage earners to make ends meet. For people who have lost their jobs, changes to E.I. benefits will result in only one third of workers being eligible. For many it was their first time going to a food bank as the downturn in the economy continues to shed jobs and employment opportunities.

**National Hunger Count:** figures show a 20% increase in the number of people totaling 794,738 people; 31% are children

**Ontario Hunger Count:** figures show a 19% increase, in the number of people totaling 374,230 people; 38% are children.

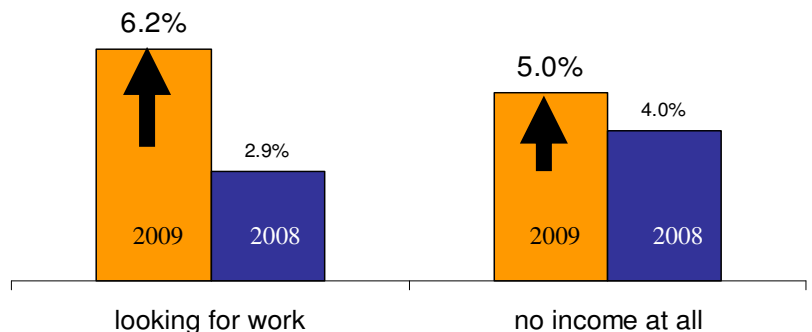
**Food Bank Access in Hamilton:**

- ✦ 26% increase in total people
- ✦ 33% increase in children under 18
- ✦ 22% increase in adults
- ✦ 22% increase in households that relied on food banks to meet their basic food needs
- ✦ 10,347 Christmas hampers were given out in 2008 assisting 25,548 people
- ✦ 28,471 individual hot meals were served across the city

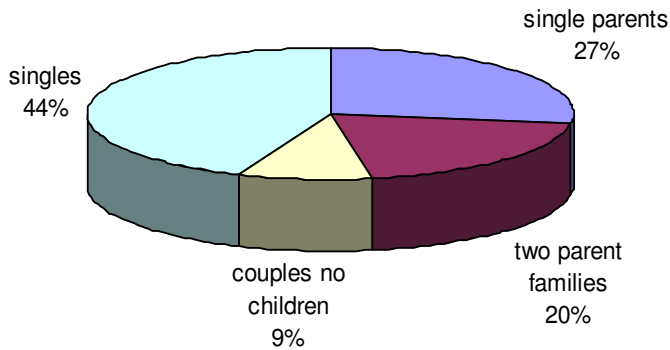
**Food Bank Income Profile:**

- ✦ 12.2% working
- ✦ 6.2% looking for work
- ✦ 45.8% Ontario Works (OW)
- ✦ 21.6% Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- ✦ 5.0% no income at all
- ✦ 5.4% seniors over the age of 65
- ✦ 2.9% had other various forms of income

**% People using Food Bank - Economic Crisis**



## Food Bank Family Profile:



- ✧ **47%** food bank users were families with children (27% single parent families and 20% dual parent families)
- ✧ **44%** are singles
- ✧ **9%** were couples with no children

**Over 5,000 parents struggle to feed their children each month and routinely sacrifice their own food so their children can eat.** Despite these measures one in ten parents report that their children go hungry at least a couple days a week. Inadequate benefit levels of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program that do not cover the basic needs is the single largest contributing factor to the depth of hunger in our community.

Since the mid-nineties social income benefits and middle to low-income levels have not kept pace with rising energy costs and market rents. This alone diminishes the ability of low income households to provide adequate and nutritious meals. Additionally, rising food costs dramatically impact meager household budgets. Costs of staple food items have increased over the last year well beyond twice the rate of inflation such as; bread 16%, milk 8%, pasta 48%, canned soup 9%, peanut butter 12%, chicken 7% and potatoes 49%.

**42% of food bank users are children under the age of 18.** Hunger among children is a critical issue. Children in food insecure households experience a lack of focus and concentration in school. Good and stable nutrition is a key element to good health. Women and children who are the largest group living in poverty experience frequent problems eating nutritionally balanced meals.

### Tremendous energy goes into operating food banks annually across the city:

- 6,982 volunteers gave 72,362 hours to food banks & hot meal programs
- Equivalent to 40 full time positions valued at \$705,529 (at minimum wage)
- Assisted 58 front line staff giving out emergency groceries or serving a meal

### Agencies who participated:

Good Shepherd Centres  
 Living Rock Ministries  
 Mission Services of Hamilton  
 Neighbour to Neighbour Centre  
 St. Matthew's House (2 locations)  
 Stoney Creek Community Food Bank  
 The Salvation Army Hamilton  
 The Salvation Army Dundas  
 Welcome Inn  
 Wesley Urban Ministries

### Did you know most food banks:

- ✧ Allow only one visit per month
- ✧ Give out only three days worth of food
- ✧ Are struggling to keep up with the need
- ✧ Close in December to redirect resources to support the Christmas Hampers Programs



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