

# CAPE BRETON DISTRICT HEALTH AUTHORITY

**For immediate release:**  
**June 28, 2010**

## **Report Looks at Local Food Relief Organizations**

Communities across the Cape Breton District Health Authority now have a better idea of what's happening in local food relief organizations. Food relief organizations include food banks, soup kitchens, etc.

*Food For Thought: A Study of Food Relief Organizations in the Cape Breton District Health Authority*, looked at the role and activity of food relief organizations in local communities. The three-year study, which saw participation from 22 food relief organizations staff, board members and volunteers, was supported by the District's Public Health Services, New Dawn Educational Foundation and other community partners.

"The idea for the study started at the grassroots level," says Margie Gillis, from New Dawn Educational Foundation and co-author of the report. "Anecdotally, we had a sense of what was happening in Food Relief organizations, but there was no hard data or local statistics to support the ideas. The results help give a profile to what's happening and may be used as a starting point to guide future programs and local planning."

Over the course of three years, from 2004 to 2006, the report showed that there were approximately 63, 715 visits made to food bank organizations. When combined with soup kitchen visits, which totaled more than 170, 000 in the same period, these numbers suggest that the demand on food relief organizations is high.

"Food relief organizations are vital to our communities," says Jan McCabe, Public Health Nutritionist and co-author of the project. "However, like many non for profit organizations, their resources are limited to do things like collect data and information on their services. The study has helped to demonstrate the number of food relief organizations within the region of the District Health Authority and the various challenges experienced by these organizations. This information is essential in accurately understanding the extent of food insecurity in our community and how to begin to address it."

Adrienne Cogswell, Executive Director of Loaves and Fishes says participating in the study has helped paint a picture of what hunger looks like locally. "People in our communities are relying on support from food relief organizations more than ever," says Cogswell. "We're increasingly seeing a diverse group of people relying on our support; unemployed, underemployed, underpaid, single parents, students, seniors, people challenged by addictions and anyone on a fixed income."

As this is the first survey of its kind done in Cape Breton, members of the community group involved says they hope the results will help organizations, governments and the District understand the positive and negative trends in the use of food relief organizations so changes can be made to address this far-reaching community problem.

"Food insecurity and poverty have drastic impacts on all of our communities," says McCabe. "Our hope is that the information generated through the study will be used to help create partnerships to examine food issues on an on-going basis and supporting strategies that strengthen and enable communities to make their neighbourhoods more food secure."

For more information or to view the full report, visit [www.publichealth.ns.ca](http://www.publichealth.ns.ca) or [www.newdawn.ca](http://www.newdawn.ca) .

-30-

**Study participants and coordinators are available for interviews by contacting:**  
**Erin Pyke**  
**Public Health Services, 563-2409**

**Food for Thought:  
A Study of Food Relief Organizations in the  
Cape Breton District Health Authority**

**Key Highlights:**

- The execution of this study included a questionnaire administered, in survey or interview form, to food relief organization staff, board members and/or volunteers. A questionnaire was developed and refined to suit the objectives of the study. Thirty-seven food relief organizations were identified and contacted for participation in the survey. Of these, 22 organizations agreed to participate.
- Over the three years surveyed, from 2004 to 2006, there were approximately 63,715 visits made to food bank organizations. When combined with soup kitchen visits, which totalled more than 170,000 in the same period, these numbers suggest chronic food insecurity.
- 60% of food relief recipients were individuals also in receipt of social assistance.
- There are a considerable (and increasing) number of children visiting food relief organizations each year.
- Although extremely committed and vital to our communities, food relief organizations are inadequately resourced and therefore have little capacity to track data that can consistently monitor food security/insecurity. Such tracking is essential to addressing the actual extent and underlying causes of food insecurity and poverty.
- Our inventory identified thirty-seven (37) food bank and food relief organizations. While the more populated areas of the District contained the majority of the services, it is startling to see the growth of food banks in areas that historically did not depend on such programs.

**Key Recommendations:**

- The District should take the lead on regular data collection and compilation related to food relief organizations in the District, including a plan for training, the development of a data base, the development of a process for collection and support for organization staff and volunteer time and efforts required in collecting data.
- The District and partners should advocate for a Provincial Tracking System to examine trends, variances and commonalities around the food relief system. The data should be made available for use by organizations at a provincial as well as a local level. It should be aggregated at these two levels (provincially and locally).
- Community partners should work together to establish a community-based Food Security Advisory Committee to examine food issues on an on-going basis and support strategies that strengthen and enable communities to make their neighbourhoods more food secure.
- The District should take the lead in working with partners to examine the needs of food relief organizations and how these can be supported through efforts, such as regular networking opportunities, coordination of training, purchasing, community programs and advocacy.
- The District and partners should continue to work to increase public awareness about food insecurity and the impact it has on communities.
- The District and communities should continue to advocate for changes in social policies, which address the underlying causes of food insecurity.