

Malvern Family
Resource Centre
Food Strategy
2024 - 2026



LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

We are so excited to share MFRC's food strategy for 2024-2026 with you. As we all know, the cost of food has gone up dramatically over the last two years. Other non-profits like the Daily Bread Food Bank have been drawing attention to rising food bank visits throughout the GTA for years. Across all of our programs and initiatives, MFRC staff have heard from members of our community that food supports are really needed, and so in the Fall of 2023, we took on this project to figure out how to better meet that need.

MFRC had food in programs pre-pandemic but had to stop delivering in-person programming during the worst of it. Before COVID, we had snacks in EarlyON and youth programs, the Tamil Seniors group coordinated catering for their in-person gatherings, and other snacks and meals were provided where possible. When we had to move to virtual programming, we had to stop the food provision in programs. However, during that time, we pivoted program food funding and time to a food depot. Staff prepared bags of perishable and non-perishable items to deliver to folks who were self-isolating or to be picked up from 90 Littles Road and the Malvern Christian Assembly. We continued this program into 2022, until the funding ended in the spring.

As we started bringing more and more programs back in-person, we were slow to bring food back into programs. It was hard to navigate having food available while mask mandates were still in place, and we were out of practice. Later in 2022 and into 2023, we were bringing more food into in-person programs, and hearing more about the need that remained.

We have chosen three priorities to focus on through our food strategy:

1. Food Access;
2. Food Growing; and
3. Food Advocacy.

For each of the three priorities, we have identified key areas of activity and corresponding actions. We have also developed an action plan that lays out who will lead each activity and when it will be undertaken over the next three years. We're really excited about what we have planned, and hope that you see your ideas reflected in those plans. We also hope that you'll join us on this journey of pushing for food security in Malvern.

Sincerely,

Dominique Robinson, Program Director &
Claire Perttula, Food Justice Projects Coordinator
Malvern Family Resource Centre

ABOUT MALVERN FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Malvern Family Resource Centre (MFRC) is an essential and trusted Community Hub that connects, engages, and takes collaborative action in supporting our communities to thrive. We use our public spaces, and our deep and authentic connections, to bring people together with a focus on those that need us the most. Each year, MFRC provides impactful, holistic, and highly accessible programs and services to several thousand children, youth, families, women, newcomers, and seniors.

Our children's program supports young and school-aged children to get a great start. Our Malvern Urban Farm drives fresh food access, with our Youth Hub providing a safe and welcoming space for young people to connect. Our newcomer programs engage and support new community members, and our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility team delivers targeted programming that focuses on building more equitable and just communities. We offer counseling and resources for survivors of gender-based violence and our older adult members engage in social, educational, physical and mental wellness programs. Finally, we use the agency that we gain from engaging in these, and other frontline programs, to elevate the voices of Malvern and Scarborough community members as we know that system and policy change are the ultimate levers to promote equity.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The development of the food strategy was a collaborative process, facilitated by [Good Roots Consulting](#).

TIMELINE

Here is a timeline of the journey we took to develop this plan:



PRIORITIES

Priority 1: FOOD ACCESS

According to the [2023 Who's Hungry report](#) released by the Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank while we were nearing the end of our engagement phase, food bank visits in the GTA increased by 51% over the last year. The [2022 report](#) had already cautioned that food insecurity has sky-rocketed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. And Scarborough was identified as a hotspot of need. A [recent report](#) by Feed Scarborough confirmed that there was a 112.6% year-over-year increase in visits to the six food banks they operate.

With the growing need in our community, we felt it was crucial to ensure that MFRC is playing a part in meeting the emergency needs of our community around accessing healthy food.

Activity Areas	Actions
1.1. Include food component in 100% of in-person programs * Baseline from Fall 2023: Average 120 programs/ week with food in 59% of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop an overarching approach, principles, procedures and budgets to offering food in all of MFRC's programs ● Develop program specific plans for increasing access to food in programs through unique approaches and a culturally relevant lens
1.2. Increase capacity to offer food access programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hire a food coordinator who will support the implementation of food in programs ● Develop new systems and processes for food budgeting, planning and bulk ordering so that we can ensure we use the funding we have as efficiently as possible ● Upgrade the kitchen at 90 Littles Road so that we can make more hot meals and have more interactive food programs
1.3. Pilot new food access programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner with nutritionists and faculty and students in relevant programs to develop and offer educational workshops on food literacy to members ● Pilot new food programs (e.g. breakfast and hot meal) for our members
1.4. Identify more sustainable sources of food donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make connections and develop sustained partnerships with groups who could donate in a more regular way ● Develop agreements with partners on how and when food donations will be received

Priority 2: FOOD GROWING

We heard from our community that there is a desire to have more places to grow and access healthy food that is culturally relevant. We also heard from our supporters that the Malvern Urban Farm is a successful example of urban agriculture in underutilized areas along the hydro corridors.

We commit to finding new markets for our current 16 farmers and to finding ways to scale the farm and support additional food growing opportunities to enable more Malvern neighbours to grow and share fresh produce.

Activity Areas	Actions
2.1. Develop new market opportunities for the Malvern Urban Farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Develop a web page for the farm and create a social media plan● Make an ambitious plan for the 2024 and subsequent market seasons, including for marketing, animation and vendor recruitment● Increase farmers' capacity for marketing
2.2. Expand the Malvern Urban Farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Create a plan and pursue funding and partnerships for farm expansion● Engage in construction and preparatory work for expansion● Recruit new farm participants and provide supports as needed
2.3. Identify and support additional creative food growing opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue to promote year round growing with hydroponics● Determine the need and opportunities for new food growing programming

Priority 3: FOOD ADVOCACY

We know that charitable organizations like Malvern Family Resource Centre are not able to solve the issue of food insecurity by giving out more food. This is a short-term, stop-gap response to a system that is failing to meet the needs of communities.

We also understand that the issue of food insecurity does not impact all communities equally. The Who's Hungry and the Feed Scarborough reports both detailed glaring systemic inequities in terms of who is most likely to experience food insecurity and access food banks. For example, experiences of food insecurity are higher among people who are Black and racialized, newcomers, international students and people living with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Food insecurity is also caused by and linked to a number of other interrelated issues, including housing insecurity, inflation, inadequate social assistance rates and wages, mental health and social isolation. In order to address food insecurity, it is necessary to take a holistic approach.

At MFRC, we commit to continuing to join our voices with the many other organizations and community members who are calling for immediate and sustained change. We will work to find empowering opportunities for Malvern community members to tell their stories and to push for changes that will meet their needs and improve their lives.

Activity Areas	Actions
3.1. Understand and communicate the problem of food insecurity in Malvern specifically	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Gather food security data and stories in our own programs● Communicate about food insecurity in Malvern
3.2. Engage in more community advocacy work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strengthen relationships with aligned advocacy groups and amplify their campaigns and positions by contributing data, stories and voices
3.3. Involve program staff and participants in advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Build staff capacity through training and resources to engage in advocacy● Offer supportive opportunities for staff and participants to participate in advocacy campaigns (e.g. writing letters, attending delegations or consultations or meetings with politicians)

LOOKING FORWARD

We know that community members are struggling to make ends meet and there often isn't enough to afford healthy food. We know that the status quo is not working and that the situation needs to change.

At Malvern Family Resource Centre, we are committed to doing all we can to support our community by providing more good food in our programs, expanding our Urban Farm, finding new markets for the produce grown by our community farmers, and pushing for change at the level of policy through advocacy efforts.

But we can't do this alone. We need everyone's engagement and support to make this plan a reality. We look forward to working with you and so many others towards a more food secure community.