

## Day in the Life Food Security

Worked as a public health nutritionist in Ontario for about 20 years. I have been in Halton for 8 ½ years working in the area of food security.

When I first started I thought food security was household food security i.e. Advocating and programming for families and household that cannot afford to buy a healthy diet for themselves. I joined the OPHA (Ontario Public Health Association) food security workgroup and quickly learned it was much more than that and I started to grapple with the concept of Community Food Security .....that was in 2000. In 2007 the Dietitians of Canada came out with a position paper “community food security” that I think nicely captures this much broader concept of food security. (a year or two before that, they came out with a paper about household food security which is also good) I refer you to both of them for more information about the area.

So over the years I have been involved with a number of different initiatives but currently I am involved mostly with the maintenance of a good food box program (what is a good food box program) in Halton and the starting up of a food policy council for Halton Region.

To tell you what I do all day is simple....I sit at my desk and work on my computer talk on the phone etc. OR I go to meetings....that's it....so to be very honest when students ask to “shadow” me needless to say I usually decline because it would feel uncomfortable having someone watch me sit there all day!!...but I am more than willing to talk to any one about what I am trying to accomplish while I'm sitting there!!

I'd like to use my work in initiating a good food box program in Halton and my current attempt to establish a food policy council in Halton to illustrate the public health competencies which are:

- Assessment and analysis
- Policy and program planning, implementation and evaluation
- Partnerships, collaboration and advocacy
- Diversity and inclusiveness
- Communication
- Leadership

I am going to use the GFB to illustrate the Assessment and Analysis; Policy and Program Planning, Implementation and Evaluation; and Partnerships, Collaboration and Advocacy.

I going to use the FPC to illustrate Diversity and Inclusiveness; Communication; and Leadership.

This division is totally arbitrary – all competencies can be illustrated in each example.

The good food box program in Halton is called the Halton Fresh Food Box. A good food box program is one where pre-paid boxes are packed with produce that is purchased in bulk and delivered to drop sites where program participants pick up their boxes of fresh produce.

Our programs' priority populations are low income families and households, seniors and new Canadians. The planning for this program started in 2002 and the first packing day was in 2004. Since that time we have grown from packing 160 boxes each month and one packing site and using a local wholesaler to supply the boxes to about 750 boxes each month and two packing sites and using not only the local wholesaler but also 5 Halton farms to supply the boxes. One hundred and fifty of these boxes are purchased by Ontario Works for their clients.

There continues to be pressure on the program to pack more and more boxes. Therefore we have received money to hire someone to develop a business plan for expansion and to start an incorporation process and eventually seek charitable status.

1) To initiate this program in Halton we started by **assessing** the feasibility of a program by doing a feasibility study to determine whether our community wanted and would use and would support/contribute to the program. A variety of tools were used in this feasibility assessment and the results were very positive.

2) Next **partnerships** were established with sectors of the community who would have a vested interest in seeing this program established. They included Multicultural Council, Early Years Centres, Seniors Advisory Committee, Farmers, Anti Poverty Advocates, Social Justice advocates and Church. Individuals representing these agencies and groups formed the Steering Committee.

3) Funding was sought from a variety of funders and we were finally successful at receiving Trillium money. Writing these proposals forced us to develop very specific **program plan including details of implementation and of an eventual evaluation** (which we conducted in 2006). We developed program goals and objectives, identified the activities required to achieve the objectives, timelines, budget and an evaluation design to measure whether or not we achieved the objectives.

As I grew in my knowledge and understanding of Community food security I could see that the Planning Department, the Community and Social Services Department as well as the Health Department had a role to play in community food security for Halton. So I started "talking up" and advocating for community food security with people of influence in the Health Department and the effect was bigger than I ever imaged or wanted for that matter. My director took this on with a vengeance and one of the things she wanted to have happen for Halton was a food policy council.

So I set out to do a feasibility study for starting one in Halton which included contacting the other FPC's in Canada to find out what are the key elements that are needed for the development and establishment of a successful FPC. I also did a focus group with what I called "community elders" ie. Individuals from very **diverse** backgrounds all who work in the food systems in Halton and all who I knew were well connected in our community and had broad perspectives. I wanted to find out from them in this focus group whether or not they thought starting a food policy council in Halton was a good idea now or at all. Again the response was an overwhelming Yes and so now I am working with them. We are not yet a food policy council so we are calling ourselves the Halton Food Committee.

We started by working on a Vision of who we are and why we are coming together....i.e. we want to **communicate** to others who we are and why we exist so I have been facilitating their thinking. I could also see that we needed more involvement of a much **wider representation of people from our food community** so I suggested at the last meeting that we hold an event and invite far and wide to accomplish hearing from as many diverse voices with regard to food issues in our community as possible. So we are planning that for April. We will use our Vision to communicate who we are to this diverse group hopefully in a way that they will be able to see a role for themselves in the FPC.

Leadership in this example (and many in public health) is interesting to look at. Yes I have definitely taken a leadership role in bringing these people together, facilitating their thinking, making sure they have the resources they need to proceed, often seeing the next step before they do BUT it is interesting because eventually they are the ones that need to take control and lead this initiative.....it is always my intention to back out of an initiative as much as possible as the shift happens.

I hope that helps to see what I am doing at my desk and in those meetings with others. I am:

Assessing and Analyzing

Planning programs and evaluations

Establishing partnerships, and advocating for issues

Reaching out to diverse communities

Communicating in many ways to many different groups for many different reasons.

Showing leadership in order to build community capacity.

All to accomplish community food security in Halton Region.