

Re-defining Productivity and Social Well-being
Through the lens of Food Banks as
Community-based Organizations

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Executive Summary

Data for this study were collected through interviews with board members, directors, volunteers, and clients of community-based organizations (CBOs), revealing that users from all walks of life and ages use food banks for any number of reasons. We learned that food banks (CBOs) contribute to the productivity and social well-being of users, workers, volunteers, the community and society in a variety of ways. We also learned that food banks contribute to participants' repertoire of knowledge and skills, primarily through the informal/incidental mode of learning. Participants reported that the typical first-time contact with the food bank is based on a need for food; however, the experience grows into a social network of friendship, helping, counseling, and other social and personal outcomes.

We found providers of government services such as social assistance, employment assistance, family benefits, disability pensions, etc. are referring clients to food banks; yet, little to no funding for food banks is derived from government sources. There is a preference among clients for utilizing food bank services over public services due to the personal and understanding approach found at the food bank. Participants projected that food banks will continue to emerge in communities to meet the needs of the people; however, if government services were operating at the required level of client needs, they said the need for CBOs such as food banks would diminish.

We learned that public policy formulators need to re-evaluate their current definitions of productivity and well-being which focus on quantitative terms, such as the amount of income one receives, the number of clients a food bank has, or the number of meals it distributes. To satisfy their funding agencies, food banks must work within an accountability framework based on quantitative terms; therefore, a lack of time and effort

has been put into defining the qualitative contributions of CBOs to the lives of those involved. When formulating policy and defining productivity and social well-being through the lens of food banks and CBOs, participants said public policy formulators and funding agencies need to combine qualitative and quantitative terms. This change is needed to more accurately define clients' sense of productivity and social well-being, and the incorporation of qualitative terms into accountability frameworks would more accurately reflect the intangible, personal and societal outcomes derived through contact with food banks.

Formulators should monitor emerging trends such as the repetition of generations at food banks where children are following in their parents' and grandparents' footsteps; a factor that indicates the insufficiency of current social programs for those who rely on them. Governments need to acknowledge the growing presence of, and need for, food banks, and public policy needs to focus on how to best define the future role of food banks in the Canadian rural and urban landscape. Policy formulators also need to recognize the contribution of food banks to clients' lifelong learning and, thereby, to their productivity and well-being. From a learning perspective, clients informally develop key soft skills such as interpersonal skills and how to handle upheavals in life and employment. They also learn about societal trends, how to barter, and how to enhance and market their employability skills. In some settings clients learn hard skills such as how to use computers, and how to budget and prepare food.

Interviewees indicated their connections with food banks contributed to their well-being by receiving food to sustain life for themselves and their families, and to their productivity by volunteering their time back to the organization. Through the lens of food

banks, clients' sense of productivity and well-being are enhanced through the maintenance of pride and self-respect, derived mainly through a personal approach not found at the public service level. Through the food bank experience clients said they gain, or regain, respect and self-respect, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency; important skills for getting back on their feet after personal and career setbacks, and enhancing their sense of productivity and social well-being. An invitation extended by participants in this study is for policy makers to come to the community level and 'step into low-income earner shoes' to see how policies directly affect their lives.

Introduction

In the summer of 2003, the Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) research project supported four summer student internships to examine issues facing rural Nova Scotia. RCIP is a 3-year project formed through a community-university partnership between the Coastal Communities Network in Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC) at Dalhousie University. The goal of RCIP is to increase the capacity of rural community-based organizations to use social science research to influence policy that affects the health and sustainability of rural communities. One issue identified of particular interest was how community-based organizations contribute to the productivity and social well-being of its community. As a result, a community-based internship was established at the Nova Scotia Community College, Truro Campus, Nova Scotia, where there are a number of food banks and other community-based organizations in the local area, and where a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) research project focused on productivity and social well-being was underway. The SSHRC researcher there saw links between the RCIP project and his research and, through the AHPRC office, applied to AHPRC for an RCIP intern to join him in fieldwork during the summer period. The goals of the internship and the SSHRC research were to:

- a. redefine productivity and social well-being using qualitative terms through the lens of community-based organizations (CBOs)
- b. identify ways in which CBOs contribute to the clients' learning.

Methodology

Data were gathered for this report through three primary sources: reviews of existing materials; media sources, key informant interviews, and client/individual focus groups. Field observations and notes, and informal discussions also served to provide background on the research sites and participants.

Review of Existing Material

There is a growing interest among governments, the social community and academic circles in monitoring social, as well as, economic progress; therefore, there is a need to measure ‘well-being’ and the development of social indicators that go beyond measurements based on the values of goods and services, changes in interest rates, inflation, or the gross domestic product (GDP)(Public Service Alliance of Canada, 2003). The PSAC says the GDP is a limited measure of productivity “insofar as it does not take activities “outside the market” into account, for example, the value of unpaid work performed “at home” or by volunteer workers” (p. 2). According to the Genuine Progress Index (GPI), a set of indicators based on a fundamental understanding that social, economic and environmental realities are inextricably linked, long-term prosperity and well-being are dependent on “the protection and strengthening of our social and environmental assets. If these deteriorate, we are not living ‘sustainably’ and we leave a poorer world to our children” (www.gpiatlantic.org, June 2003). By examining how community-based organizations, such as food banks, contribute to the productivity and social well-being of its clients, the research set out to redefine these terms because current definitions neglect to include a qualitative outlook.

Key Informant Interviews/Client/Individual Focus Groups

Ten key informant interviews were conducted, each lasting between one half and two hours. Interviews were conducted with Directors and Board Members of food banks, and included key informants who have first-hand relationships with food banks and volunteerism and who could articulate how these community-based organizations contribute to the productivity and social well-being of clients. Informants came from rural and urban communities within the central region of Nova Scotia. Focus groups were conducted with clients of participating food banks, including youth, parents, and grandparents. These clients were able to contribute first-hand information about how food banks contribute to their personal sense of productivity and well-being.

Most participants in this study were selected by executive directors at food banks who were initially contacted and notified by telephone about the purpose of the project, and how the contribution of their food banks would be beneficial to the research. Interviews and focus groups lasted for approximately one to two hours in length, ranging from one interviewee to five or six focus group participants. Key informants involved in interviews were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to provide their informed consent to participate (Appendix A). Focus group/clients were invited to participate on the same basis (Appendix B).

Field notes from interviews and focus group sessions were examined for emergent themes and key contributions of community-based organizations to the research aims. It should be noted that, due to ongoing client demands on the directors, the opportunity to meet with clients at one food bank that offered educational training was negated. We hope to return to the issue of organized education and training programs in the coming

and final phase of research. As well, due to time constraints for this project, numbers were limited as to how many organizations could be visited and how many interviews could be conducted.

Observer/Participant Activities

The SSHRC researcher saw the intern, Krista MacCallum, as a ‘value-added’ member of the research team as she lived and worked in the communities and area being studied, so she was aware of the demographics of the local area, and of the particular necessity for confidentiality of participants in rural life. By limiting focus group numbers to five or six participants, equal opportunity was given to express individual experiences and opinions.

Background and Setting: An Introduction to the Study of Productivity and Social Well-being through the Lens of a Community-based Organization (CBO)

The area focused on for this project was the central region of Nova Scotia, including Truro, Halifax, and surrounding areas. Six food banks across the province were visited in a preliminary search for a suitable research site, and it was decided one with a combination of board governance, volunteers and full-time employees would best serve as a base from which to start the research. From the initial six sites, one was chosen as a starting point for research, and contact with this one led to three others in the local area. In total, we collected data from four food banks operating in rural and urban areas. In addition, we linked into a provincial rural volunteers’ project whose board members were also involved in food banks in their local areas. Some delays were encountered in getting focus groups in place, mainly because those who were helping set them up within the CBO’s had client issues arise that required their immediate attention.

Part I: Food Bank History

Food banks in this study began as initiatives of local clergy and churches in response to growing demands for basic food and clothing. The churches saw food banks as temporary outreach programs to help individuals through a ‘temporary’ or transitional period, and to protect individuals and communities from outcomes of poverty. It is noteworthy that the food banks in this study began circa 1985, the same period in which federal and provincial governments were changing public policy and reducing benefits from social programs. In turn, individuals and families fell on desperate times and needed assistance with food and clothing; hence the emergence of local food and clothing banks. Because they were finding it increasingly difficult to deal with the growing need for assistance, and to help alleviate the pressure on individual churches, the clergy either banded together to start a community food bank or they set up church-based food banks. As noted, the initial aim in that period was to ‘help families through a 2- to 3-year period of personal downturn in a period of public policy change and economic shifts’; however, the demand kept growing and the food banks have become the way of life for many providers and users.

In 1986, there were four food banks in Nova Scotia located in Yarmouth, Sydney, Truro, and the Halifax Regional Metro Area. Today there are at least 27 food bank societies in the province and over 615 food banks across Canada (www.catb-acba.ca, Aug. 2003). Participants noted proposals for funding have been sent to governments over time to sustain their organizations, yet no assistance has been provided to date. While food banks are seen as community initiatives, participants reported they are increasingly recommended as the first place of contact/referral by social workers when a family is in

need of assistance. Table 1 shows the service pattern at one food bank in this study. Of note is that the number of recipients on file and families served saw a steady increase, the number of new recipients shows a general decline over the 8-year period.

Year:	Recipients on File:	Families Served:	New Recipients:
1995	3794	2,019	418
1996	5885	2738	460
1997	5495	2582	310
1998	5304	2581	365
1999	4894	2339	320
2000	5931	2767	333
2001	5635	2765	300
2002	6136	2890	296

Table 1. Food Bank Sample - Participation Numbers - 1995-2002

A national trend shows food banks continue to emerge in today's society as the need for assistance continues to grow. According to the National Population Health Survey (NPHS), during the period 1998/99, just under 2.5 million people in Canada had to compromise the quality or the quantity of their diet at least once due to lack of money, and 0.5 million worried they would not have enough to eat as they were short on cash. Households are considered food insecure if any of three circumstances occurs; due to a lack of money; worry that funds would be insufficient to buy food; not eating the quality or variety of food desired; or not having enough to eat (www.nre.concordia.ca, June 2003). According to the NPHS, about one-fifth of individuals in food-insecure households received help from food banks, soup kitchens, or other charitable agencies in the year of the survey. Almost one-third (31%) of people in food-insecure households reported emotional distress; three times the rate of 10% in food-secure homes (www.nre.concordia.ca). Participants in this study noted the need for assistance continues to exist in today's society.

Part II: How Food Banks Contribute to the Lives of Clients

“A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with the brick others throw at him.” – David Brink

One food bank director said ‘we provide more than just food’ and, from the data collected in this project, this statement proves correct. From our time with clients and those who serve foodbanks as full- and part-time workers, directors and volunteer workers, food banks contribute to personal, social, and community well-being to make users, directors, and community members more productive in ways that were difficult for them to categorize or quantify. For example, the language used to define these terms centered on a ‘sense or feeling of’ being productive, versus money earned or spent.

We found that clients/users of the food bank generally come from the following groups: individuals and families on social assistance; the working poor; people on disability pensions; individuals with special needs; secondary and post-secondary students; users who encountered unexpected personal setbacks and required interim help with obtaining food - including one-time very successful individuals - ; and those who are in seasonal employment and cannot keep a family going on their income levels during off-work periods. Users from all walks and ages of life use food banks for any number of reasons. Participants reported the first-time contact with a food bank is typically around a need for food; however, the experience grows into a social network of friendship, helping, bartering, peer ‘counseling’, and other social and personal outcomes that contribute to individual and collective productivity and social well-being.

Personal Benefits

Overall, the study showed a food bank contributes to the spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of its clients. The food banks’ overarching objective is to sustain lives

by providing nourishment and contributing to individual and societal well-being. Through this level of service people are able to use their limited funds for other necessities, such as paying bills or attending school and post-secondary institutions. The food bank provides a sense of relief for people who struggle from one month to the next; thereby providing personal happiness and sense of well-being for those who consider themselves the provider of their family. As well, many clients find solace in the community connection, the opportunity to volunteer, and the links to employment opportunities the food bank offers. Those clients who used the food bank for a temporary period and have re-established themselves achieve a sense of personal pride and are a key example of how food banks contribute to the qualitative well-being of clients and society. Participants in this study who required interim help and returned to full employment wonder what would have happened to them if the food bank had not been there to help. By lessening the dependency of clients on government social programs, people become more productive and aware of societal conditions than they were before using the services provided by the CBO.

To further explain how CBOs contribute to well-being, one client claimed that, through working with a community garden, she feels closer to God and self, thereby contributing to her spiritual well-being. This participant reported she combats depression and loneliness during the winter months by designing and re-designing her garden for the spring, and in researching information about foods and fertilizers that she could grow and use in her garden.

Participants generally had difficulty coming up with clear definitions when asked how they would define productivity and social well-being, and we suspect the outcome

would be no different if we asked a random sample of people in a shopping centre. Two ‘themes’ emerged, however, from their comments: We learned the shared definition for social well-being is one of ‘receiving from’ and productivity is one of ‘giving back to’. All participants reported well-being as a phase of receiving assistance from a food bank during a period of downturn and recovery in their lives, and the enhancement of self-esteem and self-respect as outcomes of that phase. Once back on their feet, participants noted a shift away from receiving to as a sense of wanting, or needing, to give back to the organization. For example, a single mother defined her productivity as being able to provide food, shelter, and care for her children. Another client stated his sense of productivity is framed around volunteering time back to the community and to the CBO; a sense he otherwise would not have gained had he and his family not availed of the food bank and shared in the experience of others less fortunate. What we found was that the two terms are distinct, but not separate, and that people either had difficulty defining the terms as separate from each other. They saw being productive, or feeling productive, as depending on one’s state of well-being, and one’s state of well-being was inextricably linked to a feeling of being productive or unproductive.

The consensus among all participants is that well-being is individually based more than community-based, and is determined on an individual basis according to how one views him or himself through a lens of self-esteem, self-sufficiency, self confidence, and a degree of freedom from public service providers. Freedom from having to deal with public social assistance providers emerged frequently in the data collection process. Although the majority of clients felt a sense of failure and embarrassment during their first visit to the food bank, they were welcomed with respect and dignity. Government

social services were seen as impersonal and unaccommodating for clients requiring their assistance, yet participants noted they were referred to the services of the food bank by social workers. Our experience in this study demonstrated that the individuals who work or volunteer at the food banks have ‘walked the walk’ of other users and each one can readily relate to and empathize with the other. This level of empathy is seen as especially helpful for first time users of the bank’s services. The attitude of participants is that, if government services were operating at the required level of client’s needs, there would be no need for food banks.

Learning

Learning was shown to be an important outcome for participants through contact with their food banks. The way in which people learn may be described as social or situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), or learning that occurs through interaction in groups. Individuals involved in this study said they learn by interacting with others through informal, incidental, accidental, and unintentional ways. The areas in which people learn range from computer applications to learning how to cope with stress in everyday life. Of the three modes of learning – formal, non-formal and informal (LaBelle, 1982) – all participants reported the informal approach as their dominant mode of learning in the food bank environment.

Clients in food banks learn how to become self-sufficient, gain teamwork and interpersonal skills, learn how to budget and eat healthy on that budget, and that everyone has the potential to set and achieve personal and occupational goals through participation in the CBO. Other examples of qualitative outcomes reported by participants are that food banks help to restore and/or increase levels of respect for self and others; restore and

enhance self-esteem and self-confidence; and renew or re-energize feelings of being productive persons. Participants said they learn these outcomes through the food bank network, and most incidents of learning are informal, unintentional and incidental. For example, one group we met with was operating a community garden where clients were learning to plan, plant, grow and care for a garden plot assigned to them, and much of their learning occurred in the social setting of the garden. We saw evidence of teamwork where one client was caring for another's garden because the latter was ill or unable to get to the garden. As noted earlier, we talked to a client who reported her life has taken a turnaround because of her being involved in the garden. The garden brought a new realm of learning to her life, gave her a purpose, and enables her to get through winter by sketching, and re-sketching, her garden as an exercise - as well as learning about what and how to plant. The food bank experience also contributes greatly to the knowledge base of clients, again in largely incidental and unintentional ways.

One client who is now a senior-level employee of a food bank stated he developed a level of trust with the food bank system due to his one-time need to avail of a bank. Through this experience he showed great initiative as a volunteer and was offered long-term employment. We saw recurring incidents where people who came to the bank as clients and continued as a volunteer long after they were 'back on the feet' and again employed full-time.

Social Aspect

Within each food bank involved in this study there was a distinct set of silently enforced rules and regulations surrounding the issue of respect and dignity in the relationships among clients, volunteers and directors of the organization. It is an implicit

rule that each client must show respect for other clients or volunteers and, if this code of behavior is not applied, they are not welcomed back to the organization. By providing a safe and comfortable atmosphere, the food bank is positioned to offer direct social benefits for its clients. By waiting in line for food, for example, people with similar life situations converse and share personal stories while marketing/bartering their skills such as neighbours arranging to help each other with yard work, babysitting, etc. In a sense, participants said the social aspect helps people in the community realize ‘they are not alone’ and they form a ‘sub-culture’ of those who share similar situations and events that turn lives around or upside down in the short or longer-term. In its own way, the food bank and its network serves a therapeutic role in the lives of many.

Food banks and CBOs also contribute to the productivity and social well-being of their clients by encouraging and offering numerous social activities such as volunteer programs and opportunities as caretakers of a community garden, teachers and students of educational training courses, or students of food budgeting classes. For those organizations offering educational services, clients are encouraged to participate in educational advancement and volunteer opportunities. A key outcome of the social aspect of the food bank experience is the sense of connectedness to community. Without food banks, individuals said they would continue to be disconnected from their neighbours and community and continue their lives with a narrower view of community and life. At the other end of the spectrum, participants said a sense of loss would occur if the local food banks were not in service. Another social aspect of clients doubling as volunteers means they can ‘work for their keep’ and in return gain recognition for work well done, as well as a sense of productivity, pride and self-sufficiency.

Community Benefits

We found that food banks have close ties to the criminal justice system and provide opportunities for individuals to serve out community service time in the food bank. In terms of social skills development, we saw first-hand evidence of a young male offender being ‘mothered’ by older women at a food bank, and a female offender who was providing community service time and bringing her child with her because she felt so comfortable and welcomed in the organization. For young offenders involved in this study, community-based organizations are a place to not only to provide ‘community service’ hours, but to learn that life is not as bad as they thought it was when they see and hear the situations of others. Through this stream of individual and community service, the food bank contributes to both the individual’s and the community’s well-being by keeping ‘at-risk’ youth and older offenders off the streets, and redirecting their thinking and actions toward more productive lifestyles.

It was difficult for the food banks to determine the number of individuals involved, and how the bank contributed to their productivity and well-being over time; however, the evidence could be ‘felt, seen and heard’ everywhere as we conducted our fieldwork. There is no doubt that the food banks involved with community service agencies contribute to societal productivity and well-being though the number of individuals they have ‘rescued’ from a criminal lifestyle through community service and giving them a sense of belonging. We encountered several individuals who came to food banks to do community service, only to stay on as volunteers when they realized they could make a positive contribution to the organization and society. In this way, the food

bank provides an opportunity for all clients, including criminal offenders, to be productive by 'giving to' the community.

In another vein of research we linked with a provincial rural volunteers' project whose local director has direct day-to-day contact with CBO's. Through this contact we learned that, according to the National Report of the National Volunteerism Initiative, volunteer resources are eroding. One million fewer Canadians volunteered in 2000 than in 1997, and efforts need to be made to deepen and extend the pool of volunteers, and food banks can be one avenue (National Volunteerism Initiative, Dec.2001). As well, the Genuine Progress Indicator for Atlantic Canada (GPI) reports that voluntary work in Canada is worth more than \$50 billion a year; yet, the volunteer hours per capita have declined by 8.7% since 1992. Interestingly enough, if the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went down 8.7%, there would be a national emergency; however, the volunteer decline has gone unnoticed until now, but by involving volunteer work as a core indicator of progress, the GPI will help to generate attention around this subject by policy-makers and the public (www.gpiatlantic.org/ab_volunteer.shtml, July 1998). Clients of the food bank are encouraged by the directors to volunteer their time in exchange for food; thereby contributing to the welfare of volunteer initiatives in the province.

One food bank we visited in a low socio-economic urban area provided a wide range of services such as low cost cooking classes, a community garden, adult upgrading, life skills and vocational programming, and more. Through these outreach programs the purpose is to achieve individual development and employment and, thereby, increase the welfare of the community. By measuring how these social programs contribute to the connectedness of participants and the community, this CBO has been very successful in

developing a set of indicators that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures around its contributions to societal and individual productivity and well-being. The problem identified to date is one where, in order to satisfy their funding agency, the accountability framework for this CBO lies in ‘number crunching’, and the use of these measurements does not reflect qualitative values of productivity and well-being achieved by the CBO and its clients. Through our field time in this study we determined that food banks do contribute to the productivity and well-being of clients, the community and society in immeasurable ways.... and these outcomes have to be reflected in accountability frameworks if we are to accurately define or redefine these terms.

While it can be argued measures and definitions of productivity and well-being are personal benchmarks, we found many stakeholders benefit from the services provided by food banks, especially through informal processes. It may be, for example, that a framework of qualitative values for productivity and well-being can be found through learning outcomes derived from time spent in a food bank environment. Other qualitative outcomes may be a better sense of self, a renewed energy to seek work, the regaining of a purpose in life, or a healthier child or person. The purpose of this study was to find ways in which policy-makers can redefine productivity and social well-being through the lens of food banks as community-based organizations; therefore, to achieve a balance in the outcomes for clients and funding agencies, we found it is necessary to combine qualitative and quantitative terms if we are to eventually define the terms in ways that reflect their dual outcomes.

Part III: How Food Banks contribute to the Welfare of its Users, According to Directors/Board Members

According to the director of one successful CBO, food banks are like a ‘second home’ for clients. All participants reported users are welcomed at the door and feel safe and comfortable in this atmosphere. Through the services provided at the food bank, clients receive respect and are ‘served with dignity’. Through interaction with the food bank, clients are exposed to volunteer opportunities and the majority of users return to the bank in one way or another, to ‘give back’ to the community and, therefore, become more productive. Participants expressed the view that public policy needs to focus on linkages between informal learning acquired through the food bank, and productivity and well-being. Two of the food banks we visited for this study offered educational programs that provide clients with value-added employability and level-entry computer skills. Directors of these organizations said that, by providing training, clients will be more qualified and successful at obtaining employment.

There are very few risk factors involved in the operation of a food bank; however, one trend of interest to public policy makers was the ‘generational repetition’ of clients noted by directors. The trend is that second and third generations of food bank users are showing up for assistance, and this trend has implications for public policy in terms of how it deals with this established service and need. There is a concern in the food bank network that the third and upcoming generations of clients are following in the footsteps of their parents and becoming dependent on the services of the food bank. According to GPI research, the fact this trend exists is evidence that the pattern of family cycles in poverty continues; therefore, policy makers should look at this trend and consider its

implications for public policy. “The Genuine Progress Index (GPI) is based on the fundamental understanding that social, economic, and environmental realities are inextricably linked”(www.gpiatlantic.org/releases/pr_incdist.shtml, July 2001). The GPI group notes that, since 1990, middle income earners in Nova Scotia have lost the most income in absolute terms (average \$3600) and the poor have lost the most income in percentage terms (29% of their disposable income). The poorest 20% of Nova Scotian households are the poorest in the country” (www.gpiatlantic.org/releases/pr_incdist.shtml, July 2001).

For the most part, food banks continue to be a temporary resource for people in need; yet forming dependencies was not envisaged at the outset of establishing food banks. Related to this issue, seniors, who are known within the ‘network’ to be needy, are reported to be extremely hesitant to use the food bank as they were raised in a generation where they learned to provide for themselves. Yet, we met seniors who served with pride at food banks and valued their ability in retirement years to be ‘productive’ and contributing to someone’s and societal well-being.

Another issue mentioned by directors and board members is the lack of funding and support from levels of government. It was noted that social service workers tend to recommend clients to the food bank for assistance, while these CBOs struggle to operate with limited budgets and through community generosity and corporate sponsorship in the provision/donation of food. As the number of food banks continues to increase, and the need for assistance remains in existence, what remains is the need for governments to acknowledge the need and support for food banks through public policy.

Part IV: Message to Government

According to the National Council of Welfare Report for 2002, “the poorest of the poor are falling farther behind and the gap between the haves and have nots widens in a country so often regarded as the best place to live in the world.” (www.ncwcnbes.net/htmdocument/reportwelfinc02/Welfare2002.htm, 2002)

The consensus among all participants in this study to re-define productivity and social well-being through the lens of food banks was that quantitative values are placed on the two research terms, productivity and social well-being, thereby neglecting any qualitative outcomes or contributions to society or individuals. The interviewees in this study said public policy formulators need to re-evaluate current definitions of these terms, particularly in how accountability frameworks are designed for CBO's. As well, through our experience in this study we found the current social programs such as social assistance, family benefits, disability pensions, etc. are not sufficient for those who rely on them. Many clients of food banks are from fixed and low income groups, and they reported they or their friends were referred to the food bank by public social assistance agencies for interim assistance; yet, little to no funding for these organizations is derived from government sources. A recurring trend reported by interviewees is that increasing numbers of their peers prefer to avail of a food bank and the personal approach found there, rather than deal with the impersonal nature of the public services provided by government. Participants said that, if government services were operating at the required level of client needs, there would be no need for food banks.

One director of a successful CBO said that productivity can be defined both qualitatively and quantitatively, and his organization has been attempting to develop a set of indicators and outcomes using both approaches for his key funding agency. His CBO has identified outcomes such as discovering and realizing the client's personal strengths

and capacities, establishing personal relationships, forming a greater connection to their community, becoming productive by volunteering and giving back to the community, and overall improvement in people's lives. These changes were monitored through an 'appreciative inquiry' approach which helps people see the potential of others and themselves by overcoming the limits they impose on their personal capacities (<http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org/>, 2003). This is another area for continued study in the final phase of this research, and the research team will be monitoring progress in this food bank's undertaking. In general, governments and their public policy formulators need to acknowledge the growing and existing presence of and need for food banks, and develop a public policy framework to support them. This study suggests that, by feeding the hungry, fewer crimes are committed and less abuse and suffering occurs in the population served.

The study found that food banks contribute to the informal and life-long learning of the clients, yet there is a significant gap between policy frameworks and our understanding of the contribution of lifelong learning to individual, workplace and societal development, productivity and well-being. A transition to a learning society in a knowledge-age economy is underway, so in what ways should public policy support that shift?

From our research, we have concluded that governments on all levels need to re-define their existing definitions of productivity and social well-being from exclusively quantitative terms to incorporate qualitative elements. There is a need to revise existing views of public providers of social services and how they benefit/serve their users. The participants in this study suggested government policy formulators, from all levels,

should ‘take a walk in the shoes of low-income earners’ and see how their policies directly affect people’s lives. Generally, as the accountability framework for a community-based organization lies in number crunching to satisfy the funding agency, the measurement for productivity is inaccurate and misrepresents real advancements of societal and individual productivity and social well-being. Overall, through CBOs like food banks clients learn informally how to market themselves, work with others and give back to the community as volunteers. We found food banks are essential contributors to productivity and social well-being, and an overall benefit to society.

Part V: Conclusions and a Vision for the Future

From this study it can be assumed CBOs like food banks do benefit clients and community for many reasons. Overall, the banks contribute to the productivity and social well-being of those who have contact with them, and it is for this reason that the current definitions of productivity and well-being lack the important qualitative aspect. When a low-income family receives assistance to celebrate the holidays, or can afford to pay for electricity during the cold winter months, its well-being is increased in tangible and intangible ways. In order to enhance the value of both outcomes, however, governments need to re-evaluate their current programs and adjust them to benefit the more unfortunate members of society by providing funding for CBOs such as food banks.

Suggestions for further work in the area of re-defining productivity and social well-being through the lens of CBOs (i.e. food banks) include a recommendation to link both social and economic indicators, and compare them through accountability frameworks for CBOs as the two are interdependent and interrelated. Another suggestion revolves around the economy and the need for government programs and services to

respond in concert with economic shifts. When a change in public policy affects society as it did in the mid-80s, there is a public responsibility to have alternate safety nets in place like publicly supported food banks, rather than offloading responsibility for social well-being to the community level.

Through conducting an annual social indicator survey or questionnaire, and publishing the results, public and community action can be planned to deal with the emerging trends and issues. An extension of this idea is that, through a connection with Statistics Canada, a variety of social and economic indicators can be identified to influence public policy that is responsive and reflective of societal conditions. If a partnership was formed with Stats Canada, specific indicators could be identified and used for more in-depth research, as well as help in redefining productivity and social well-being. Overall, it is important the message be relayed that more current and adequate definitions of productivity and social well-being should incorporate both quantitative and qualitative outcomes as a first-step in accurately redefining the terms.

Appendix A

Protocol for Semi-Structured Interview

Interview guide for Kevin Quinlan and Krista MacCallum in fieldwork associated with SSHRC and RCIP research project into definitions of Productivity and Social Well-Being, and associated policy formulation – **Focus group/Individual client guide.**

Group/individual identification code _____ Date _____, 2003

Location of interview/focus group: _____

We are conducting research that involves an examination of how productivity may be redefined to enhance social development and well-being. We are interested also in policy formulation and learning as part of the research. As noted in the Consent Form, your answers/responses will inform our research, all information you share will be held in confidence, and your name will not be used anywhere in the report.

1. Would you please give us some background on yourself in terms of how you ‘found your way’ to this community-based organization (CBO)? What happened along your career/life path that resulted in your being here?
2. We are interested in how people define the term productivity. [Provide explanation of the research aim to develop non-quantitative definitions of the term e.g. We tend to define terms like productivity and well-being in dollar terms]. What is your understanding of the term? What does it mean to you to be productive, and how would your definition translate to the reality of your life and situation?
3. What would others in your family/circle of friends [and your employer] say about this issue? Would your descriptions be the same? Different? Why/how?
4. We are also interested in how people define the term well-being. [Provide explanation of the research aim to develop non-quantitative definitions of the term] What is your understanding of this term? What does well-being mean to you, and how would your definition translate to the reality of your life and situation? How about your community? In other words, what is your ‘sense’ of own your well-being? How would you describe or define it?
5. What would others in your family/circle of friends [and your employer] say about this issue? Would your descriptions be the same? Different? Why/how?
6. Do you think current definitions of productivity adequately describe what it means to be productive in Canada? Do you think current definitions or reflect social development in this country?

7. In your opinion, do you think current definitions of productivity and well-being reflective of societal perspectives? Why? In what ways does this community-based organization contribute to your productivity and well-being? Start with well-being, then talk about productivity? What do you see as the difference in the two terms?
8. From your experience, what could governments do from a policy perspective to help organizations like this one to better contribute to productivity and well-being in the lives of people and their communities? As we noted earlier, we tend to define these terms in a financial way. How would you redefine productivity and well-being through a new policy development process?
9. If you could give any advice to governments about the role this organization plays in your life, or the lives of others, what would you say? What would be the key contribution this organization makes to your productivity and well-being?

We now move into the issue of learning and the role learning plays in the lives of interviewees

Learning:

Provide interviewees with background on the issue of learning and why it is important to this research. The key points are:

People learn through 3 keys ways/approaches:

1. Formal (the school, college, university – formal environments)
2. Nonformal (organized workplace learning, libraries etc)
3. Informal (accidental, incidental, unintentional – more than 90% of what we learn in our lifetime we learn informally) Talk about this and the nature and types of learning that occur through a CBO.

We are also interested in learning:

- what you learn about yourself and/or society through this CBO
- how you learn
- why you learn
- Who helps/guides you in the learning process
- when you learn – in what kind of situations- and,
- what you do with the knowledge gained.

In other words, how does the learning you experience through your participation in this CBO contribute to your productivity and well-being?

Do you have any questions/comments?

Thank you!

Phase 2 2003

Appendix B
Protocol for Semi-Structured Interview

Interview guide for Kevin Quinlan and Krista MacCallum in fieldwork associated with SSHRC and RCIP research project into definitions of Productivity and Social Well-Being, and associated policy formulation – **Board Member/Director Interview Guide**

Group/individual identification code _____

Date _____, 2003

Location of interview/focus group: _____

We are conducting research that involves an examination of how productivity may be redefined to enhance social development and well-being. We are interested also in policy formulation and learning as part of the research. As noted in the Consent Form, your answers/responses will inform our research, all information you share will be held in confidence, and your name will not be used anywhere in the report.

1. Would you please give us some background on yourself in terms of how you became involved in this community-based organization (CBO)? What happened along your career/life path that resulted in your being here?
2. We are interested in how people define the term productivity. [Provide explanation of the research aim to develop non-quantitative definitions of the term e.g. We tend to define terms like productivity and well-being in dollar terms]. What is your understanding of the term? How would you define it? What does it mean to you to be productive, and how would your definition translate to the reality of your life and situation/the lives and situations of clients in your CBO?
3. What would others in your family/circle of friends say about this issue? Would your descriptions be the same? Different? Why/how?
4. We are also interested in how people define the term well-being. [Provide explanation of the research aim to develop non-quantitative definitions of the term] What is your understanding of this term? How would you define it? What does well-being mean to you, and how would your definition translate to the reality, lives and situations of your CBO clients? How about your community? In other words, what is your 'sense' of well-being as it applies to your CBO and the people it serves? How would you describe or define it?
5. What would others in your family/circle of friends [and your employer] say about this issue? Would your descriptions be the same? Different? Why/how?
6. Do you think current definitions of productivity adequately describe what it means to be productive in Canada? Do you think current definitions or reflect social development in this country?

7. In your opinion, are current definitions of productivity and well-being reflective of societal perspectives? In what ways does this community-based organization contribute to productivity and well-being? Let's start with your well-being first. Then we will cover productivity?
8. From your experience, what could governments do from a policy perspective to help organizations like this one to better contribute to productivity and well-being in the lives of people and their communities? As we noted earlier, we tend to define these terms in a financial way. How would you redefine productivity and well-being through a new policy development process?
9. If you could give any advice to governments about the role this organization plays in society/the community and the lives of clients, what would you say? What would be the key contribution this organization makes to productivity and individual/social well-being?

We now move into the issue of learning and the role learning plays in the lives of interviewees

Learning:

Provide interviewees with background on the issue of learning and why it is important to this research. The key points are:

People learn through 3 keys ways/approaches:

1. Formal (the school, college, university – formal environments)
2. Nonformal (organized workplace learning, libraries etc)
3. Informal (accidental, incidental, unintentional – more than 90% of what we learn in our lifetime we learn informally) Talk about this and the nature and types of learning that occur through a CBO.

We are also interested in learning:

- what you/others learn about self and/or society through this CBO
- how you/others learn
- why you/others learn
- Who helps/guides you/others in the learning process
- when you/others learn – in what kind of situations- and,
- what you/others do with the knowledge gained.

In other words, how does the learning you experience through your participation in this CBO contribute to your productivity and well-being? [An open-ended question that will go where the respondent takes it]

Do you have any questions/comments?

Thank you!

Phase 2 2003

**Appendix C - Framework for Re-defining Productivity And Social Well-being
Through the Lens Of Community-based Organizations**

Food Bank Information			
Began largely by churches in mid-80's as temporary assistance programs for 1-2 years			
Increasing need for assistance exists... no end in sight			
Current social services are insufficient for meeting basic needs			
No government funding provided to food banks, yet they fill a public service gap			
	Productivity & Well-being Outcomes		
Personal	Social	Community	
Contributes to spiritual, physical, and mental well-being	Contributes to social well-being in a safe/comfortable feeling/environment	Provides community services such as gardens	
Sustains lives	Meet neighbours	Community connectedness	
Sense of relief, happiness, pride	Opportunity to market and barter skills	Contribute to community through volunteer initiatives	
Opportunities to volunteer = productivity	Encourages volunteering	Criminal offenders work community service hours	
Re-establishing self-sufficiency	Forms a sub-culture that cares for members	Keeps at-risk youth off the streets and engaged	
Lessening dependency on social programs	Forms network of helping peers	Less crime, abuse, and homelessness	
Builds or regains self-esteem, respect, confidence	Offers a place for displaced persons to go for help	Opportunity to 'give back' to the community	
Offers opportunities for learning in a number of areas... mainly in informal mode, and in soft skills Offers training in some sites	Offers needed services in a period of economic and/or personal downturn	Beggars the question 'What would happen to society, individuals & community if food banks didn't exist?'	
Enhances one's knowledge of self and what needs to be done to help self			

Message to Policy Formulators
Redefine definitions of productivity and well-being to reflect qualitative outcomes
Current social programs are not 'user-friendly' nor meeting the needs of those on fixed incomes
Acknowledge the growing and existing presence of food banks
Policy makers should monitor generational repetition of clients at food banks
Provide funding for community-based organizations that fill gaps left by public policy
Take a walk in low in-come earners shoes to see how policies affect people's lives
Introduce a social indicator survey that leads to a forum discussing the issues identified. Link this with Statistics Canada to identify social and economical indicators.

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