

Salt Spring Island Community Services FOOD SECURITY



SALT SPRING ISLAND COMMUNITY SERVICES

FOOD SECURITY OVERVIEW

SSICS currently has a number of services under the "Food Security" program area. They include: 1) Food Bank, 2) Christmas Hampers, 3) Community Garden, and 4) Let's Do Brunch. In addition there are other services in other program areas that have food as a regular element including Family Place, Yellow Sub Drop In, Core Inn Youth Drop In and Community Initiatives Day Programming. Food and food security is gaining increasing importance at SSICS and in the community. It is time to plan for the future-including reviewing and refining food security programs and their financial sustainability.

Background

SSICS has provided an emergency food bank service for many years. In the 1990's this involved issuing emergency bags for 10-12 people a week from a SSICS cupboard in the staff room. In 2000 it provided food for 25 people a week from a new location in the SSICS main building basement. In 2006 it provided food to 60 people from a newly constructed food bank building complete with grocery store shelving and cold storage. In 2010 the numbers have increased to an average of 130 people plus an additional 25 family and counsellor boxes. The food bank has always been run by volunteers with support when needed from SSICS staff. In 2005 SSICS developed a Volunteer Coordinator Position to provide more coordination and support to the growing volunteer team. The food bank has always run based on "universal access" with no residency or other requirements and conditions for use. The food bank is the largest scale food-related activity operated by SSICS. In addition to generous donations of food from the community SSICS spends approximately \$ 60,000 on food for distribution, including fresh produce, eggs, cheese etc. In 2010 SSICS spent \$ 100,000 on food in total for all programs. Most purchasing is done locally-primarily at Thrifty Foods and Country Grocer.

Christmas Hampers are distributed each year to individuals and families making a formal request. These hampers are more significant than a typical food bank bag, and include a turkey/chicken (depending on number of people the hamper is for), extra nutritious food and treats. In most years the hamper distribution has also been coordinated with "Santa's Workshop" to include gifts for children. The hamper program is an intensive and popular volunteer activity- from sorting donations to organizing and delivering hampers. Over the past few years approximately 200 hampers have been distributed per year.

In 2007 a hot lunch program was developed by volunteers to run concurrently with food bank distribution on Tuesday. Auntie Pesto's Cafe was an early contributor, providing fresh homemade soup. The program was well attended from the start and provided lunch to an average of 20 people. The program has shifted to more of a breakfast program with hot and cold offerings and is now known as "Let's Do Brunch". It serves an average of 42 people every Tuesday and is one of the "entry points" to food bank services as well as other SSICS resources. It is housed in the main SSICS building in the downstairs program area that underwent kitchen renovation in 2010.

In 2006 a modest community garden was developed on the SSICS grounds in conjunction with the mental health drop in program. This peer support program developed few raised beds for vegetables, herbs and flowers. The garden quickly became a therapeutic gathering place for a range of individuals and small groups. In 2007 the lower SSICS grounds were fenced to permit the garden to expand. A community-based committee was struck and a full scale community garden was planned. Brandon Bauer, a local permaculture gardener, led the initial design and development. Pat Reichert, a local food security advocate, led the rallying of volunteers and resources. Over the past four years the community garden has gone through a slow and steady evolution. In 2009 Rebecca Martin was employed to coordinate further development to make the garden more "user friendly" and strengthen it's connection with other food security activities. The objectives of the garden were reviewed and changed to include a stronger "interconnectedness" vision. In 2010 the septic field was decommissioned, and a proper irrigation system was installed which paves the way for the final stages of the basic garden design. It is important to

note that at all points of its development it was recognized that the amount of produce was not the primary goal, but rather the therapeutic activity of gardening and promotion of health and nutrition among vulnerable populations.

Additional food-related accomplishments in the recent past:

In 2005 a separate, new building was constructed to house the food bank. It provides 800 square feet for food storage and distribution. It is equipped with fridges/freezers and grocery store-style shelving. This building project was led by the local Masons (Admirals Lodge) service club and was funded entirely by community donations.

In 2006 SSICS made brief foray into community food security policy. SSICS secured funding from the Vancouver Island Health Authority to lead a food security planning process resulting in a report written by Pat Reichert. Since that time there has been increasing activity from other organizations (Island Natural Growers, Area Farm Plan) to continue this community development so SSICS has stepped back from any leadership or coordination role.

Other food-related activities at SSICS:

Family Place Resource Centre for families with young children plans several activities around food including a weekly drop in lunch and a weekend Dad 'n Me pancake breakfast.

Yellow Sub Mental Health Drop In also plans several activities around food including group lunches and dinners. Food selection and preparation is a component of the life skills aspect of this service.

The Core Inn Youth Drop In has a small snack and beverage service providing healthy snacks and drinks at affordable prices to youth attending the drop in. The Core Inn building used to house a restaurant and has a licensed commercial kitchen.

Community Initiatives day programming for people with developmental disabilities provides a daily lunch for participants, including many with special dietary needs.

Recent Developments

Over the past year numerous actions and issues have come to the forefront related to food security including:

- A recognition that food and food security is an area of regular activity across many SSICS services and the organization could benefit from better understanding, planning and coordination in this area.
- A recognition that SSICS should strengthen the food component in all areas (Core Inn, mental health, early childhood, community living, shelter)
- The community garden continues to evolve, as noted above, and most particularly has prompted consideration of food security as a continuum from growing to harvesting to storing/preserving to preparing to eating/enjoying.
- Food Bank use continues to increase and even with recent expansions (eg. new building) we struggle to keep up with the need. It is commonly perceived that the current service is increasingly less “family friendly”.
- SSICS has numerous kitchen resources that are more and more valuable assets to be maintained and improved. A renovation of the main SSICS site to include a complete kitchen was done in 2010. Better use of the Core Inn commercial kitchen is being contemplated.
- Space and equipment for food storage is being recognized as a challenge to be addressed, both within SSICS programs and with the people we serve. This includes the storage of fresh and dry goods, and prepared meals/food items.
- SSICS has increased its services to the homeless including shelter and outreach. This increases food-related activity at SSICS.
- SSICS partnered with Foxglove Farms to make fresh food boxes available to low income families.
- There is an increasing interest and recognition in food preparation and consumption/celebrations as a basic activity to be considered as a core element of many SSICS services promoting health and well-being.

- SSICS continues to add new community connections and partnerships directly related to food security: (Country Grocers, Thrifty Foods, Island Natural Growers, Auntie Pesto's Cafe, Barbs Buns, Salt Spring Cheese, Foxglove Farms, etc)

The Future: Opportunities and Challenges

- Food-related activities at SSICS continue to be the single biggest area for volunteer involvement and community donations (cash and kind).
- Food Security is a growing area of interest and focus in most communities. There are many interesting ideas and best practices to be learned from others (eg. "grow a row" and harvest recovery programs in other communities, therapeutic gardening at various farms).
- There is an interest and possibility to enhance SSICS mental health services to include a food preparation and frozen meal program (similar to one currently happening in Victoria).
- Food bank use continues to increase and the operational systems and process require ongoing review and adjustment.
- The community garden site and infrastructure is in place and the garden is ready to thrive. This may include community gardening connections-grow a row, fruit harvesting, and other community gardens. Support was provided by the Berman Foundation, who may be interested in further support.
- There is an interest in expanding and improving food programs, including a family food bank service, as part of SSICS early childhood services.
- There is an interest in making better use of the Core Inn commercial kitchen, including community kitchen, vocational training and a food preparation social enterprise.
- There are opportunities for further partnerships with local food producers.
- Many of the initiatives listed above require additional resources. SSICS requires some core funding and additional project funding to pursue many of these directions.