Meet the folks who make FoodShare happen! We are modeling change by reviewing and revising our own human resource practices. In 2018, we applied a poverty reduction lens to our pay grid review, increasing wages by 25% for employees in the lower pay bands while wages for senior managers, directors and the executive director remained unchanged.
The Right to Food

Canadians have a right to food – sort of. In accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which the Canadian government ratified in 1976, everyone living in this country has a right to food. That makes the government the duty bearer in ensuring that people can feed themselves, their families and their communities.

This does not mean that the government is required to give out free food. Rather, the government is obliged to create the conditions for people to be able to access good, nutritious, affordable food with dignity, now and in the future.

Successive governing parties, however, have failed to meet these obligations.

The causes of food insecurity are complex. Nevertheless, using food charity as the default response to hunger is a significant contributing factor. In essence, politicians can be seen sorting through bins of leftover food for a photo-op while ignoring the structural barriers preventing people from achieving their right to food.

Food banks and community food programs are important. They are the result of communities trying to address an issue that governments have allowed to reach crisis levels. But to truly solve the crisis of food insecurity, bold policy interventions are required instead of relying on the charitable sector.
What causes food insecurity?

To tackle the issue of food insecurity we must first acknowledge the structures that determine who currently experiences the most food insecurity. For people of colour, new immigrants and people with disabilities, the barriers multiply. Anti-Black racism, ableism, white supremacy and transphobia all shape how we get to eat, who gets to work and even who gets to participate in finding solutions to hunger and decision-making opportunities.

We know that in the city of Toronto, 13% of the population experiences food insecurity. What we don’t often talk about is the fact that the number jumps to 27% for folks from racialized communities, especially those that are Black or Indigenous. Nearly 50% of Black children live in low-income households, compared to 9% of non-racialized kids. More than 40% of children in the care of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto are Black. Almost half of the students expelled from school are Black, despite making up only 12% of Toronto’s student population. Furthermore, 62% of food insecure people are employed. These are folks working hard at paid jobs yet they still can’t make ends meet.

We need to support those who take the risk of speaking truth to power. We need to be part of the solution if we’re going to see meaningful change. As movements, as companies, and as non-profits, it is imperative that we go beyond redistributing leftovers to poor and hungry people and address the roots of food insecurity directly.

"Anti-Black racism, ableism, white supremacy and transphobia all shape how we get to eat, who gets to work and even who gets to participate in finding solutions and decision-making opportunities."

Since 1985, FoodShare Toronto has been working alongside communities for equitable access to good food and is now Canada’s largest food security and food justice organization. The programs range broadly, supporting communities with vastly different needs and demographics. Regardless, each is informed by our embedded principle of food justice which also shapes our own organizational operations.
At FoodShare, we align and evaluate our programs to ensure that they contribute to dismantling sites of exploitation within the food system and our food movement. Our goal is to centre food justice in everything we do. By taking our cues from those most affected by poverty and food insecurity, we work towards inspiring long-term solutions in our food system that are rooted in principles of food justice.

Through our programs and community engagement, we reach more than 260,000 people each year. We do this through innovative programs including our:

**Supportive Partnership Platform:** a stewardship platform where community-led food-focused organizations can leverage FoodShare’s assets to realize the change they seek. We prioritize groups and organizations that are led by people experiencing marginalization in the food system (i.e. Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and/or newcomer communities) and that work on food justice issues.

**Good Food Markets:** FoodShare supports over 45 community-led markets that sell high quality, culturally appropriate, affordable vegetables and fruit in communities across Toronto.

**Student Nutrition Program:** in partnership with Student Nutrition Toronto, FoodShare supports 800+ breakfast, morning meal, snack and lunch programs.

**School Grown Program:** a schoolyard farming project where vegetables and fruits are grown on school rooftops and grounds while creating paid training experience for youth facing systemic barriers to employment.

**Field to Table Schools Program:** FoodShare’s education team creates engaging lessons, workshops, and events for students from junior kindergarten to high school, parents, caregivers, and educators. These workshops raise awareness about healthy eating, sustainability, and the social and economic impacts of the food system as it relates to food access.

For a deeper look at FoodShare’s programs, visit [https://foodshare.net/programs](https://foodshare.net/programs)
Inside FoodShare

FoodShare works to ground its programs in the knowledge that profound power imbalances exist in our society. The food movement is no exception. Instances of systemic racism in the food system are omnipresent: the legacy of colonialism through land theft perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, the kidnapping and enslavement of Black folks, and the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers are just a few examples.

Armed with this understanding, in 2018 we took a deep look at how our organizational policies, our work with local communities, and our role as a leader in the food movement could be better rooted in the principles of food justice. As a result of this internal reflection, we initiated the following:

- **Established an Indigenous Advisory Circle**
  - It is vital that we continue to prioritize reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. At FoodShare, we understand that a land acknowledgement is a meaningful first step, but we need to challenge ourselves to do more to advance reconciliation. With this goal in mind, we co-created the Indigenous Advisory Circle to support and guide FoodShare in our ongoing learning and actions. The Indigenous Advisory Circle advises us on programs, policies and our collective advocacy work. They set the agenda for how we collaborate with Indigenous communities in advancing Indigenous food sovereignty.

- **Instituted new human resource policies**
  - We are keenly aware that many employees in the food sector experience low-paid and precarious working conditions, contributing to a growing gap between a minimum wage and a liveable wage. People employed in the food industry are among the lowest paid in today’s workforce and, ironically, the most food insecure in Ontario. That’s why we applied a poverty reduction lens to our most recent pay grid review (July 2018). Employees who fell within lower pay bands received an average wage increase of 25% while those in the highest bands, including senior managers, directors and the executive director, received a 0% increase.

- **Initiated staff training**
  - Many assumptions guide the food movement’s work. Given our food justice mission, we apply a critical equity lens to program design and delivery. This means embedding food justice in all our initiatives, from the recipes used in a cooking workshop to how we write a fundraising proposal. We provide anti-racism training for staff and board members, demonstrating how oppression manifests in our food system and food movement.

"FoodShare works to ground its programs in the knowledge that profound power imbalances exist in our society."

For instance, the Indigenous Advisory Circle led the drafting of FoodShare’s land acknowledgement statement so that it incorporates FoodShare’s key principle of food justice and what that means for Indigenous communities. Moreover, the advisory circle provided advice which was incorporated into FoodShare’s food justice statement and includes a reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Report.
■ Put a spotlight on women chefs of colour
  ▪ Women constitute nearly 50% of restaurant workers, yet only 20% of Toronto’s chefs are female and of these, only 6% are head/executive chefs. For female chefs of colour, the numbers are even lower. In a dynamic culinary city like Toronto, that’s a failure. So we highlighted more than 30 female chefs of colour at our largest annual fundraiser, Recipe for Change. Following the fundraiser, we hosted a panel discussion exclusively featuring women chefs of colour to discuss race and gender inequity in the culinary world.

■ Engaged youth voices
  ▪ School Grown: The model for the School Grown program is straightforward. We identify students facing systemic forms of marginalization, hire them as schoolyard farmers in full-time summer positions, and pay them above the minimum wage. These students spend the summer earning money that often goes toward supporting their households. They also gain high school credits while learning agricultural and entrepreneurial skills as they work on one of our school farms. These farms grow produce that students sell at low-cost markets in their neighbourhoods. They also provide a space where participants are seen as leaders and experts, disrupting the negative stereotypes often associated with “marginalized” or “urban” youth.

■ Improved working conditions
  ▪ Food insecurity is primarily an issue of income. As an employer, FoodShare is aware of the costs associated with increases to minimum wage. We’re also aware of the costs associated with inaction. We proudly support a $15/hr minimum wage, and equal pay for equal work for our employees and recognize the benefits of doing so as a member of The Better Way Alliance. The Better Way Alliance advocates for decent working conditions and fair wages from the perspective of the business owner, which includes a $15 minimum wage, paid sick days and fair scheduling.

■ Employee support: We recognize that our work wouldn’t be possible without our hard-working staff. That’s why we increased the number of personal days offered, boosted matching RRSP/TFSA contributions and made our emergency loan system more robust.

Food Access Problems need Food Justice Solutions
Partnering with aligned organizations

One additional framework we have adopted to champion food justice is our Supportive Partnerships Platform (SPP). The SPP is a stewardship platform where community-led food initiatives can leverage FoodShare’s existing assets such as office space, finance management and general expertise to realize the change they seek. We prioritize groups and organizations that are led by people experiencing marginalization in the food system (i.e. Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and/or newcomer communities) and that work on food justice issues.

Our current partners include groups such as:

- **Black Creek Community Farm**, an awe-inspiring space where much more than food grows
- **Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee**, a group dedicated to bettering public space in their neighbourhood
- **Birchmount Community Action Council**, a residential council run by folks dedicated to building leadership in their neighbourhood via contributions to biodiversity and food security
- **Midtown 416**, a collective dedicated to serving the Ethiopian community by creating opportunities that are economically and socially enabling

Demanding Justice for All

At FoodShare, we have developed numerous dynamic and innovative community food-based programs and initiatives that build community capacity while responding to the need for access to affordable produce. But this alone will not solve food insecurity or poverty.

The charitable sector cannot work in isolation to drive the systemic changes needed to advance the rights of those who continue to experience food insecurity. While the food movement must continue to address the systemic oppression that contributes to poverty and food insecurity, including within our own organizations, we can only be successful when coupled with meaningful public policies. We must collectively advocate for policy interventions that dismantle the systems preventing far too many from accessing the food they need. We can cheer and clap for a handful of policies, or, as a collective, we can advocate and demand justice for all.

"We must collectively advocate for policy interventions that dismantle the systems preventing far too many from accessing the food they need."
Food banks and community food programs are important, but will not solve food insecurity or poverty. They are the result of communities trying to address an issue that governments have allowed to reach crisis levels.

By: FoodShare Toronto