

## Healthy Start Stories about Food Insecurity

Having enough food is a huge issue for the women and families who attend Healthy Start for Mom & Me programs. Here are some everyday scenarios of participants. Healthy Start teams work hard to help women and families find the resources they need to resolve these issues.

- Mother of 3 small children is expecting her income assistance cheque on Friday. She is down to her last bit of milk and bread and her cheque does not arrive. Now they must get through the weekend (borrow money, borrow food, or use a food bank).
- A father just lost his job and does not have enough hours to collect EI. He and his wife just had their first baby. They have only 4 slices of bread and milk to eat. No money until maternity benefits start. Joyful moment mixed with desperation and uncertainty.
- Mother with small children and without a car. Pays almost double for some food items at the closest store. Her other option is to spend money on a cab to get to a store where food is cheaper, but that will give less money for food.
- A family of four, part of the nominee program came to Canada. Both husband and wife professionals and came with \$15,000 in Canadian funds. Husband pushed out of his position by the union and was unsuccessful to secure further employment. His wife was expecting their 3rd child. The \$15,000 dwindled to mere hundreds until it was completely depleted. He was crushed because he has no job and no food. They came to our program and were happy to take home leftovers.
- Visited a mom to give baby clothes. Mom asked if there was a place she could get potatoes. She said her kids hadn't had a decent meal in a couple of days. The only things in the fridge were onions and margarine. She had to pay the gas bill because they were going to cut it off so that left very little money for food.
- Mother of 2 came to our program and disclosed that she was feeding her 6-month old baby sugar water because she ran out of formula.
- A pregnant woman feeds her children cereal and eats nothing herself because there is nothing else to eat.

Other strategies participants in program have resorted to:

- Moms adding extra water to baby's formula to make it last until their next cheque.
- Watering down cow's milk to make it last longer.
- Purchasing cheaper, less nutritious food (chips, pop, noodles).
- Participants and children coming to program hungry. Their first and possibly only meal of the day is the one they get at our program - in the afternoon.

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To offset these realities of hunger and inadequate food, Healthy Start is able to:

- serve nutritious inexpensive food at drop-ins
- demonstrate how to make a variety of easy, inexpensive, nutritious recipes
- offer ready-to-cook Meal Bags that serve 4-6, for \$1.50
- offer cooking events
- provide milk coupons, prenatal vitamins and Vitamin D (for breastfeeding babies)
- offer group learning opportunities about nutrition and food costs
- consult one on one with a dietitian
- provide support from an outreach worker who can refer moms to other community services or act as an advocate with systems.