

Feeding Fredericton Take Action Project

By: Shirley Avery

Identify A Concern

My main concern was that there was currently no on-going, long-term, highly visible, food bank item drop off sites on campus, that I was aware of. Other concerns included that the average student at UNB may not be aware: of the fact that the food bank may be experiencing food shortages for the amount of people they serve that are in need in the Fredericton area, especially in the months following December; that the food bank may accept perishable food items as long as they are whole uncooked foods; the diversity of the type of citizens of Fredericton that probably were accessing the food bank; or the underlying causes of community poverty that contribute to community hunger other than “bad choices made by an individual.” At this time I felt interested in finding out if my predictions about this situation were correct and if so to address it!

I think this is a concern because I feel with effort put into educating the student population and highly visible, or well known attractive drop off sites, the university campus population could successfully supply an on-going sustainable amount of food items to the food bank, increasing their ability to help others. All students do not have a large amount of disposable income, but, because UNB campus is a high volume, high traffic area with the majority of students coming from middle class socio-economic backgrounds, with even a small amount of increased participation in donating food items to the food bank a large change could be made. As well, providing the opportunity for faculties to work together and encouraging them to do so may encourage university staff members to become involved. Examining the amount of time I had available and my concern, I decided I would like to try to design and begin a long term sustainable network of drop off sites on campus that were successful in gathering donations on an on-going basis, but, that could function well based upon team work. This would ensure no one student or staff member having to accept many time consuming responsibilities, which I thought would help maximize involvement.

Research Your Concern

First I began by asking about 30 students and 10 staff members from different faculties (including Chemistry, Psychology, Business, Leadership Studies, Education, Engineering, and Kinesiology), randomly during informal friendly conversations questions such as:

- Do you know of a food item drop off site for the Fredericton Food Bank on campus?
- What do you know about the Fredericton Food Bank?

- Have you ever donated a food item to the Fredericton Food Bank?
- Do you know if they accept perishable food items?
- Do you know if the food bank will come to you to pick up food items?

The overwhelmingly popular answers to these questions were as follows:

- Do you know of a food item drop off site for the Fredericton Food Bank on campus?

A: No

- What do you know about the Fredericton Food Bank (FFB)?

A: Very little information specifically regarding the FFB. Students were aware of what a food bank is and what they generally do.

- Have you ever donated a food item to the FFB?

Number one answer: No

Number two answer: once or twice, usually during Christmas season or a special event food drive.

- Do you know if the FFB will accept perishable food items?

A: This is the question I had the most diversity in responses to but most students said, “no,” they did not think so, some said “maybe,” only one said “yes,” (a student attending Renaissance College), and a number of staff members were also unsure, but, about half knew the answer was yes.

- Do you know if the FFB will come to you to pick up food items?

A: No one that I asked this question knew the correct answer, and at the time neither did I.

Next, I made it a point of asking specific long-term employees and UNB student union executive members (I dropped into their office in the Student Union Building) if they knew of any ongoing programs to create ongoing incentive for students to donate to the food bank. No one was aware of any such program.

The next step was that I called the FFB myself. I spoke to the Chris Fougere, who is on the management team. He was friendly and answered all my questions in a very forthcoming transparent manner. He confirmed my suspicions that the food bank was experiencing a steady on-going food item shortage, but, especially in the months following December. They never turn anyone away and split whatever donations they have into baskets that they distribute, but some months they are much smaller than others based upon the amount of items being donated. He was not aware of any current partnership with an on-going drop off program at UNB. He confirmed that they did accept perishable food items as long as they were not cooked and were whole and unprepared or tampered with. The food bank has a full time driver, one of their only 5 paid employees, who you can either schedule a regular pick up time and day with (5 days a week) or can call 24 hours ahead of time to ensure a pick up time the very next day! This was great news because one of my initial worries was available transportation to deliver donated items to the food bank, as currently I do not have my own motor vehicle. I conferred with him about my tentative plans to try and increase on-going donations from UNB students and staff members, and he supported my idea. I offered to send any final copies of materials that I would be using to

promote the FFB (ie. Posters, Emails, Letters etc.) to him for approval, he expressed this was not necessary but appreciated the offer.

I began to educate myself further on the underlying causes of poverty in the Fredericton Area, the diverse age and back ground of people that accessed the FFB, and what research articles had to say about how to plan a successful donation program. Many of the people that access the FFB are single parents, senior citizens, people with disabilities and currently unemployed, or struggling, parents. The number one factor that positively affected donations and volunteerism hours in attempted programs were “incentives,” even when they were small or silly or just a possibility, such as in a prize draw (Nunn, 2010).

Find Out Who Supports You

I knew I wanted to include different faculties and different groups of students and staff members on campus so I spoke to friends and peers asking if they would be willing to help me operate a drop off program, with incentives, and educational functions on campus. It took quite a few conversations but I successfully secured 7 acquaintances who were willing to help, on an on-going basis, doing minor responsibilities (a staff member of Sodexo, an executive member of ASU and member of the business faculty, an executive member of the Chemistry Society, a renaissance college student, a member of the Kinesiology faculty, and a Cross-Cultural Program Coordinator at UNB).

I realized, although, I would like to design attractive thought provoking, educational posters and signs to label the drop off sites myself, it was unlikely I would have the time to do this, I do not currently have the technical skills to do so in an time effective manner. Instead I researched online and found appropriate posters, designed by organizations supporting the fight against community/world hunger and asked a close friend who is talented in poster design to create a poster design that we discussed.

As already stated, I ensured I had the support of the FFB before moving forward with planning.

Create A Plan

The following was the Action Plan I created:

- Use the seeding money we could access and divide it into 4 or 5 \$10 Tim Horton's gift certificates, to use as incentives for a monthly draw for those who donated to the Feeding Fredericton Program. I owned (a previous personal gift) a \$20 Wal-Mart gift certificate that I decided to split into two \$10.00 cards. This would allow me to begin right away and have enough prizes already on hand for approximately 6 months.

- A peer that had offered to be my partner began to disagree with this approach, saying she had ethical issues with using the seeding cash as prizes. Her participation was valued and important to me.
- I believed these incentives were key to spreading word of mouth about the program around campus, and making it a success. We decided to compromise and canvas for donations to use as monthly prizes that students/staff members could enter to win when dropping off a food item on the shortage list for donation. I had planned on doing so, but, to secure donations for prizes for the following year, so when I tried to pass on the project it was less work for the next person to take on. I believed that once one person won a \$10.00 gift certificate for donating something that cost \$2.00 they would express their happiness to others in their lives and this would contribute to the success of the visibility of the program.
- My partner decided to use the “seed budget” money to pay for printing purposes (posters) and other materials we may need, and transportation costs.
- Work with “hub leaders” (the 7 volunteers) who agreed to fulfill the following responsibilities:
 - * Give me guidance on where to place an attractive visible drop off site somewhere safe (where food could not be removed, most suggested their faculty administrative office), with a ballot box and ballots (honour system, we’d notice if there were consistently more ballots than items).
 - * Forward along an informative inspiring email twice a month to their class members: promoting the program, listing the FFB’s food shortage items, and educational facts about the FFB; as well, as inspiring facts about combating community hunger. The content of these features would constantly change every month.
 - * Print off at least 5 posters once a month (featured poster will change to maintain engagement, inspire self education, and participation) and display them around their building.
 - * Keep an eye on the drop-off site to ensure its safety and success (and notify me if perishable food items were donated), and aim to have at least 10 items on the shortage list at the end of each month.
- It would be my job to create the initial drop off display, set it up, organize pick up by the FFB, write the monthly letter for the leaders to forward to the general student/staff population, email the leaders the monthly poster, contact The Brunswick and the campus/local radio station to mention and support our program and organize the monthly small prize draw.
- I designed this action plan based upon the following idea:

If we could manage to create 7 successful hubs initially, who donated 10 items per month that would result in 840 (70x12) more items a year being donated to the FFB. I expected that once the first couple of months’ prize winners told others in the student or staff population that they won a \$10-\$20 gift certificate because they donated a small food item which cost them much less, word of mouth may increase participation. If hub leaders and myself were able to increase the amount of items each station donated monthly to 20 (that would be one item from less than 10% of the

amount of individuals emailed by most hub leaders) items by August, perhaps next year that number could double to 1680 more food items being donated to the FFB! Also, it would be possible for the hub leaders and myself to find a replacement (if they were not a continuing student or staff member) to continue our work the following year. Working on the Education Student Executive this year, I felt confident that a member of the executive next year would like to take on my role to continue the program. We work in a field (education) where we see firsthand the negative results of community hunger in some of our own students, so it is a topic that is close to our hearts. Also, other than having sustainability possibilities the program could be expanded to include more drop-off sites.

Take Action

- I decided it would be more effective to make the time to not only email each hub leader directions but also meet with them individually in person to discuss the program! I independently met with all hub leaders for approximately 20 minutes in person.
- I secured posters I wanted to use and met with the Feeding Fredericton poster creator, we discussed some ideas, he created the poster, we met again to discuss changes, and he emailed me the final copy, he offered to continue making more posters if needed.
- I wrote a letter appealing to businesses for small donations, emailed it to my partner who had initially agreed to canvas as a team but decided to canvas certain businesses while I covered others (I agreed this was a fine idea) and canvassed over 15 local businesses independently in person (a complete list is available upon request). I canvassed the uptown larger chain store area, and she did downtown Fredericton. I received positive feedback from many businesses (who I planned to touch base with again because I was waiting on feedback from a manager or owner), and offers of donation from 2 (Snooty Fox {I had called a friend who works in management there}, and Subway on Prospect St.) during my initial canvassing, my partner informed me she unfortunately did not receive any positive feedback.
- I created 5 attractive ballot boxes at home from materials I already owned, and my partner created 3.

Evaluate Your Plan

- At this point I realized I would no longer have the support of a partner in Fredericton and was going to be out of town for the months of March-mid May. I decided it would be too much of a burden that could result in the ultimate failure of the program to ask the hub leaders to assume more responsibilities than originally discussed.

- I initially thought it would be a good idea (agreeing with guidance from my professor) to rely on just a couple friends to be my feet on the ground while out of town for the months of March, April and May and that I could confer with them and even the food bank via Skype and email from China. We could successfully run two stations in Marshall D'Avray: one for the building staff (manned by Brenda the lunch lady, one of my initial 7 hub leaders) and one for the students (manned by a couple of peer students). This became my new plan, and to wait to expand to all 7 stations when I returned. However, while printing off posters and ballots I realized that the Marshall D'Avray building is going to be highly vacant during this time period because all education students will be completing their seven week teaching practicum. Due to this blunder, I decided to wait until I returned from China in May to initiate the Feeding Fredericton Program. I still feel this program can be a success and do not plan to let the hard work I have already invested go to waste!

-During the process already described, I did reflect and re-evaluate initial ideas to try and be more successful. Some goals I changed were:

* Initially, I thought it would be a good idea to canvas large locally owned businesses, after visiting a couple I decided to change to target restaurants. I realized I could explain to managers that if they donated a \$10 or \$15 gift certificate, the person who won it would more than likely dine with someone else and pay cash for the rest of their meal. Because of the high margin mark ups on restaurant foods the amount of profit they would make as a business would more than likely outweigh the actual amount they donated.

* At one point recently I had thought it may be a good idea to: instead of having an actual ballot box to supply tape and get participants to scotch tape their ballot to the food item they dropped off. The ballots would be brightly coloured and attractive to the eye, and in the place for their name it will say in fine print: please print very large. This may work well in an area like a faculty office where there is little threat someone would rip off someone else's ballot to put their own there because it offers a way participants can be recognized as the volunteers who donated items, while walking past or checking out the display. Research has proven and advice articles suggest public recognition could increase participation

Apply Your Learning

Although, my take action did not proceed as I expected and I do feel let down, embarrassed and disappointed, I did get a lot of positive feedback about my idea and how it could work and fill a need successfully.

I gained further experience in writing donation letters and realized if selling tickets on a raffle basket in New Brunswick, you must first apply for a permit. I became familiar with the regulations about doing so.

I learnt more about my local community and the FFB, and can help disseminate and spread this knowledge in my teaching in the future. For example, the Fredericton food bank also accepts clothing donations. Students can receive boxes once a month as well. As well, as the detailed instructions about the process that one has to undergo to begin receiving support from the FFB.

I also learned to have confidence in my own ideas and not trust or rely on others if my gut instincts are not to do so. I did not repeat canvassing the private businesses downtown asking for small donations after my partner said she had received no positive feedback in this area; even though, I found this surprising as this was the area I thought from prior experience canvassing for donations last year would result in the highest amount of success. Later when another friend had canvassed the exact same area for a charity that did not help the local community (usually a harder sell for donations) and received a very large amount of success, I regretted this choice. Also, in the end I regretted changing what I thought would be a more successful approach to satisfy my partner who in the end decided to do a different project all together. These are only my own personal reflections and do not reflect poorly upon my partner or her commitment or ability to help others.

Overall, I thought taking part was a very rewarding experience and could easily be applied to a elementary or high school level where the “hub leaders” would be the teachers and their class could play the same role as the UNB student population would have.

References

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Appendices

Dear Sir / Madam:

Subject: Sponsorship Program for Feeding Fredericton Project

My name is Shirley Avery, and I will be graduating from the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick in July 2012. Feeding Fredericton Project is a program that myself and my partner, Tara Ferguson, have designed to increase the amount of food items being donated to the Fredericton food bank every month.

The Fredericton Food Bank started in 1984 and is a private outreach program. Food and clothing are distributed free of charge once per month to individuals and families who request assistance for emergency situations. Last month the Fredericton Food Bank provided 766 local families with hampers of food to help them meet their basic staple food needs. Individuals and families, single parents, seniors on fixed incomes, persons with disabilities: all have the common denominator centered on higher costs of rent, food, gas and heating which leaves them with no monetary resources to buy staple food supplies, especially in the cold winter months. The Center's continual success and operation is dependent upon volunteers and donations from individuals, businesses, churches and other organizations.

Tara and I have designed the Feeding Fredericton Project to motivate UNB staff and students to begin to donate food to the centre by sending out motivating emails citing:

- the food bank's monthly food item shortages,
- the new easy to use drop off sites we created and
- the incentive of receiving a ballot to enter into a monthly prize draw each time an individual donates an item.

We are also working to increase the knowledge on campus of the underlying causes of *community hunger* by communicating with the student body through posters and short presentations.

If your organization is willing to contribute a small donation to be used for a monthly prize (a \$10.00-15.00 gift card would be ideal) your logo and company information will be included in the 2011-2012 Sponsors List attractively displayed at each drop off site and be included in all public engagement events conducted during the academic year. Our public engagement presentations are targeted to the UNB Community (Faculty, Staff and Students) and we will be conducting a minimum of 4 presentation activities this year. These events will take the form of public presentations, radio announcements/spots, newspaper ads, and student activities. We can also provide you with a receipt for the donation to file for the donation tax rebates this financial year.

I would be happy to discuss our program and how your organization can get involved in such a great opportunity at your earliest convenience.



Thank You very much for your time,

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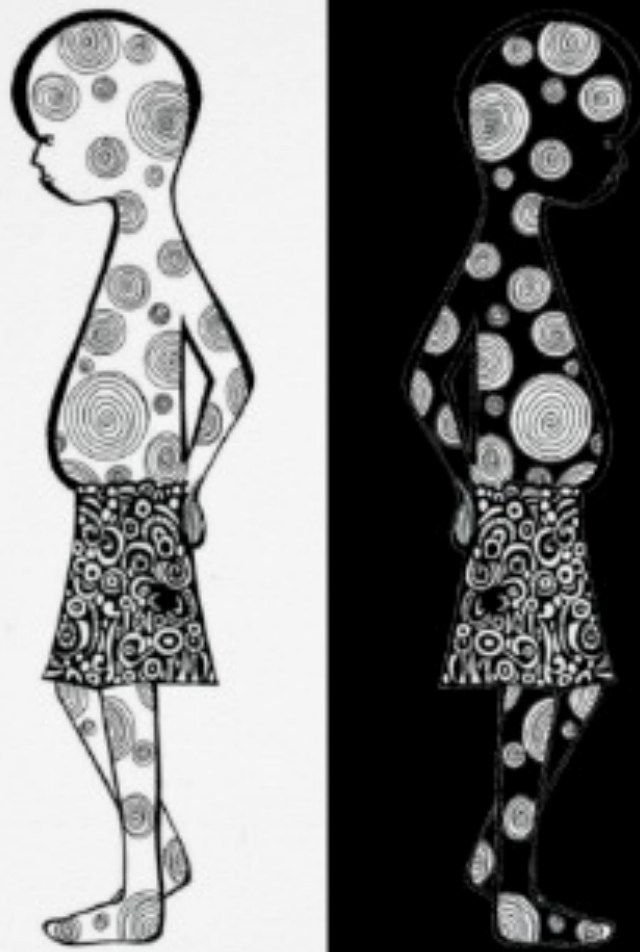
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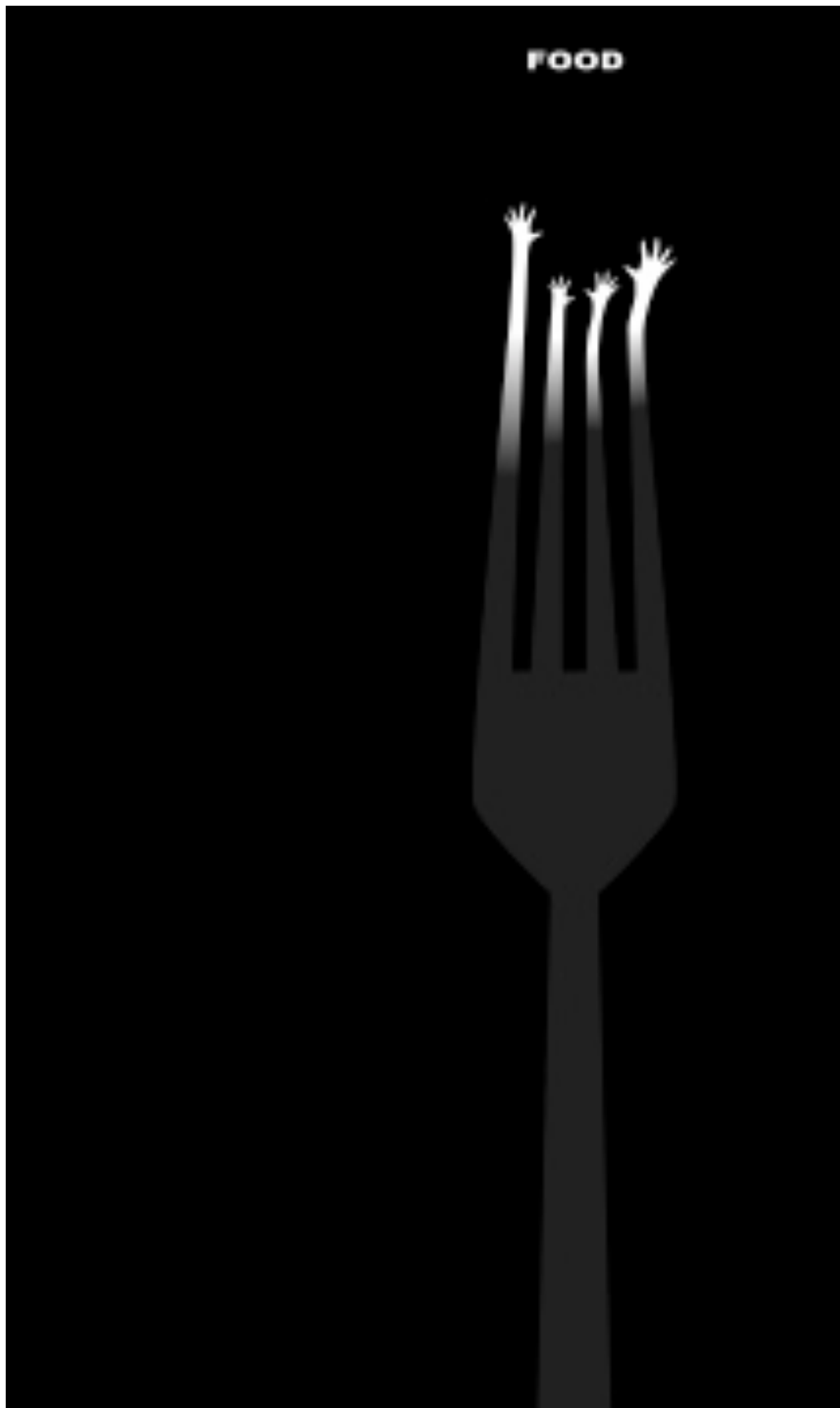
got food?



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