

Mount Saint Vincent University
Department of Applied Human Nutrition

**Growing Food Security from the Ground Up:
A Case Study of the Kids Action Program**

By
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Abstract

Background: In 2012, 17.5 % of Nova Scotian households reported experiencing food insecurity - a situation of uncertain or limited access to acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. Women are particularly vulnerable to this situation; a major concern given the negative and interrelated impacts of food insecurity on multiple dimensions of human health. There is a need for comprehensive approaches that address food insecurity, including the inequality and inequity that underpins this issue.

Purpose: This thesis explored the potential contributions of a community-based program in efforts to address food security for low-income women and their families. More specifically, by drawing on the perspectives of staff members and participants and complementary data, it explored: 1) the “*everyday experiences*” of food insecurity for women who utilize these programs and, 2) the ways that a community-based program addresses issues of food insecurity through their programs and broader engagement.

Methods: A qualitative, exploratory, single case study design was followed, using the Kids Action Program (KAP) as the case. Data collection consisted of individual interviews (with women participants and KAP staff members), document review and participant observation in relevant KAP programs and activities. Analysis was informed by two theoretical frameworks - a conceptual definition of Individual and Household Food Security and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System’s Theory.

Results: These results describe the experience of food insecurity for women who participate in KAP programs. Most prominent, was the coordinating power of money and its influence over women’s “choice”, specifically their ability to access enough healthy foods for themselves and their families. These individual experiences must be considered relative to interactions between these women and their broader environments – this includes the ways that the cost of living, the cost of food, organizational policy and household debt influence and interfere with participants desire to be food secure. It also includes an understanding of how the broader ideological environment, including labels, stigmatization and judgment, contribute to the persistence of poverty and food insecurity as significant social issues.

These results further describe the ways in which the KAP contributes to food security, for the women and families they work with, as well as others in their community. This encompasses a spectrum of understanding of what is needed to build food security, where outcomes of individual participation in KAP programs are realized in conjunction with organizational commitment, partnership, and advocacy to realize systems change. It also highlights the important role of organizational leadership and the philosophies and values of staff members in developing meaningful programs and speaking out against injustice.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Participants experiences with food insecurity primarily centered on their limited economic access to healthy nutritious foods for themselves and their

families. It also included other broader consequences and barriers such as organizational policies, and judgment from others. The KAP contributed to food security for these women at multiple levels – temporarily providing them with improved access to resources, while also engaging in partnership and education activities that aimed to address the social and political conditions in which food insecurity exists.

To address food insecurity, community-based programs need strong organizational leadership, founded on principles of social justice and long-term change. Institutions looking to address food security must give community-based programs the autonomy they need to address the needs of their participants and communities.

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

~ Margaret Mead

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity is defined as a situation that occurs whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain (Anderson, 1990). According to recent analyses of Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) data, an estimated 17.5% of Nova Scotian households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity at some point in 2012 (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014), up from 17.1% in 2011 (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2013). Of particular concern, is the high prevalence of food insecurity among Canadian households with children (15.6%), more specifically, those headed by female lone-parents (34.3%) (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014) as well as the disproportionate numbers of women (compared to men) living in households characterized as food insecure (Health Canada, 2010; Matheson & McIntyre, 2013). The gendered nature of this experience is further recognized in regional studies within Atlantic Canada, which suggest a high prevalence of food insecurity among low-income, lone-mothers (Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; McIntyre et.al., 2003; McIntyre, Glanville, Officer, Anderson, Raine & Dayle, 2002); with some research indicating rates of food insecurity as high as 96.5% among the populations studied (McIntyre et.al., 2002).

The negative and interrelated impacts of food insecurity on multiple dimensions of human health (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a; Gucciardi, Vogt, DeMelo, & Stewart, 2009; Cook, et.al., 2013; Muldoon, Duff, Fielden & Anema, 2013), give rise to the significance of this issue as a serious public health concern. For women, food insecurity has been linked to a myriad of poor health and nutritional outcomes, including elevated levels of distress and increased incidence of chronic disease (Tarasuk, 2001a), and deteriorations in intakes of almost all food groups (Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Tarasuk, McIntyre & Li, 2007; Glanville & McIntyre, 2006),

with particular sensitivity documented in the consumption of milk and milk products (Glanville & McIntyre, 2009; McIntyre, Williams & Glanville, 2006; Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010) and fruits and vegetables (Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Ramsey, Giskes, Turrell, & Gallegos, 2012; Mello, Gans, Risica, Kirtania, Strolla, & Fournier, 2010). The negative experiences of food insecurity for low-income women (often lone-mothers) and their children have been further detailed through multiple analyses of a sample of women in Atlantic Canada. Generally, these findings provide similar accounts the management of food at the household level, where mothers are often the first to carry the burdens and consequences of food insecurity in order to spare the negative effects for their children (McIntyre, Officer, & Robinson, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; Glanville & McIntyre, 2006).

While many initiatives have been established to address food insecurity in Canada, charitable food assistance programs, in the form of food banks, were the first and are arguably still the most pervasive response to food insecurity and hunger in this Country (Tarasuk & Davis, 1996; Riches, 2002; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Slater 2007; Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen, & Skinner, 2012). Despite its necessity for providing short-term relief to food deprivation and hunger, the charitable model fails to address food insecurity in any systemic or sustainable way (Tarasuk, 2009; Emery, Fleisch & McIntyre, 2013; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012a), and the negative experiences associated with the use of emergency food assistance, including feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation, have been well-documented (Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht, 2002; Gaetz, Tarasuk, Dachner & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Williams et al., 2012a). What's more, the basic premise of food banks divides society into 'have' and 'have not's' (Power, 2005a) through the establishment of a two-tiered food system - market-based for those who can afford it and subsistence-based for those who cannot (Power, 1999).

Recognizing the deficits of the charitable model, and in pursuit of a more comprehensive approach to food security, activists began to promote the idea of ‘community food security’ (CFS)¹ in 1994 (Allen, 1999). As a concept, CFS expands upon individual/household definitions of food security, adopting the same basic anti-hunger frame, but merging this with sustainable food systems perspectives, thus emphasizing longer-term, systemic approaches to building food security and health for *all* community members (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). Strategies that fall under this “community” frame include (though are not limited to) food-buying clubs, farmers’ markets, alternative food distribution networks, community-supported agriculture, and food gardens (Tarasuk, 2001a; Kantor, 2001). While primary research (Kortright & Wakefield, 2010) and systematic reviews (Carlsson & Williams, 2009; Brown et al., 2005) have critically examined the impact and potential outcomes of community-based strategies from a food systems and CFS perspective (Carlsson & Williams, 2009; McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo, Costello, 2005; Brown et al., 2008), there are relatively few studies that have explored how these responses address food security from a social justice or individual/ household food security lens (Power, 1999).

What evidence is available from the latter paradigm has largely focused on the participation, reach (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013a) and the potential for involvement in these programs to significantly alter household resources for at-risk individuals and families (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b). Cumulatively, the results of these studies suggest that community-based responses lack the capacity to resolve issues of food insecurity for their participants, an issue deeply rooted in chronic poverty and persistent income

¹ Community food security is defined as a situation in which “all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, pg. 37).

inadequacy (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b). While the research completed by Tarasuk and Reynolds, (1999), Tarasuk (2001b) and Vozoris and Tarasuk in 2003(b) has contributed significantly to our understanding of community-based approaches to food insecurity in Canada, the main focus of these studies has been to assess the material outcomes of individual participation in such programs, and thus, their capacity to address the impoverished circumstance that undoubtedly underpins this experience. Less consideration, however, has been paid to the environments in which these programs are embedded (i.e. organizations, staff members, etc.), leaving the processes that occur within these systems and their potential contributions to individual/household food security poorly understood.

In order to draw a more holistic and rich understanding of community-based approaches to food insecurity, that includes the environments in which these programs are implemented, this thesis study sought to explicate the food-security related work and contributions of the Kids Action Program (KAP) - a network of outreach programs located in the Annapolis Valley region that are funded through the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)². Specifically, using a case study approach, this research project presents a qualitative description of the *everyday experiences* of an “at-risk” population of women, including their involvement in KAP’s food security related programs, KAP as an organization, and how this relates to their experiences with individual/household food insecurity. Through further analysis, these experiences have been considered in relation to the broader work

² The *Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)* funds community groups to develop or enhance programs for vulnerable pregnant women. Through a community development approach, the CPNP aims to reduce the incidence of unhealthy birth weights, improve the health of both infant and mother and encourage breastfeeding (Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, 2010a). The *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)* provides long term funding to communities to deliver programs that address the health and development of children (0-6) who are living in conditions of risk. It recognizes that communities have the ability to identify and respond to the needs of children and places a strong emphasis on partnerships and community capacity building. Both programs are funding streams of the Public Health Agency of Canada (Community Action Program for Children, 2010c)

of KAP staff members – including the ways in which they engage and position themselves relative to the broader ideologies and policies that serve to maintain the unequal access to resources, such as those that gives rise to food insecurity.

1.1 Problem Statement:

The high prevalence of food insecurity among Canadian women (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014) alongside numerous studies indicating the negative health implications that coincide with this issue (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a; Gucciardi, Vogt, DeMelo, & Stewart, 2009; Cook, et.al., 2013; Muldoon, Duff, Fielden & Anema, 2013) highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that address food insecurity, including the inequality and inequity that underpins this issue. Given the negative experiences and impacts coinciding with the use of charitable food assistance, there is an evident need for research that explores the potential of capacity building and participatory approaches to addressing issues of food insecurity long-term, particularly those that do so using a social justice (or individual/household food security) lens (Power, 1999). Importantly, much of the available research has conceptualized the contributions of these community-based strategies in terms of their capacity (as a program) to alter an individual or household's material circumstance (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarsuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b), leaving the broader environments in which these programs are embedded, and the interactions and processes within these systems poorly understood. There is a need for improved understanding of community-based approaches to food security, that considers the experiences of those who utilize them, the agencies that implement them and both their material and process-related outcomes. This research is particularly critical in Nova Scotia, where provincial rates of food insecurity are the highest in the country (Tarasuk, Mitchell &

Dachner, 2014) and food security has been named as one of four priority action areas in Nova Scotia's healthy eating strategy (Government of Nova Scotia, 2005).

1.2 Research Question(s):

How does the Kids Action Program (KAP), through their food-security related work, contribute to household food security among low-income women and their families living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia?

1.3 Research Objective(s):

(1) To explore the '*everyday experiences*' of low-income women living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia in relation to their involvement in KAP's food security related programs, KAP, and household food security.

(2) To explicate the levels in which the KAP is engaged in efforts that address the broader inequities and dominant ideologies that underpin and maintain issues of household food insecurity throughout Nova Scotia.

(3) To use lessons learned to create an understanding of the potential for community-based agencies and the programs they implement to contribute to household food security in Nova Scotia, and apply these learnings to the development of recommendations for community-based programs across Canada.

1.4 Summary

This chapter has presented a brief introduction into the issues of poverty and household food insecurity and the implications this has for women and their families. It has also highlighted

current approaches to address these issues in Canada and Nova Scotia, differentiating charitable from community-based responses as described in the current literature. Critical research assessing the capacity and efficacy of community-based approaches has been presented alongside the argument for more comprehensive explorations of the potential contributions of these programs (including the work of organizations in which they are embedded) to individual/household food security. In addition, this section has outlined the study presented here, which sought to examine the ways in which a community-based program (KAP), contributes to household food security; shaped by an understanding the experiences of women who use these programs and the engagement of staff and the organization of KAP in efforts that seek individual and systems change.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Prevalence of Hunger and Food Insecurity in Canada

Hunger - the “*uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food*” (Anderson, 1990, pg.1560) - has emerged as a significant social problem and serious public health concern within the developed world (Riches, 1997; Tarasuk, 2005). While the issue has likely always been a reality for low-income families, public awareness and visible evidence of hunger in Canada did not come until the early 1980’s, when ad-hoc community groups and coalitions began to respond to growing concerns of people going hungry through the establishment of charitable food programs, primarily in the form of food banks (Tarasuk, 2001b; Tarasuk, 2005) (*See section 2.8 for a more comprehensive overview of responses to food insecurity in Canada*).

Hunger is now understood as part of a broader spectrum of events and experiences, collectively termed *food insecurity* (Radimer et al. 1990). Until recent (Health Canada, 2007), the number of individuals using food banks was the primary marker of the existence and prevalence of hunger and food insecurity (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; Power, 2005). According to the Canadian Association of Food Banks (2013), more than 833,000 Canadian households were assisted by a food bank in a one-month period in 2013. Although highly sensitive to the hunger state, food bank usage is not a specific marker of food insufficiency or insecurity (McIntyre, 2003), with previous research suggesting that only a small proportion of food insecure households are regularly accessing these services (Power, 2005; McIntyre, Connor & Warren, 2000; McIntyre, 2003; Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009; Vozoris and Tarasuk, 2003a) – the vast majority of whom are likely to be characterized as severely food insecure (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009). In light of such evidence, it is probable that estimates of food bank usage have,

and continue to under-represent the true proportion of individuals and households experiencing food insecurity in Canada.

Since 2004, the prevalence of food insecurity in Canada has been more accurately reported through the addition of valid food security questionnaires in national level population health surveys (Health Canada, 2007). According to estimates from the most recent analysis of Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) data, 12.6% of Canadian households reported experiencing marginal to severe food insecurity over the previous year of data collection (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014). Of particular interest in the context of this thesis, in 2012, the prevalence of income-related food insecurity in Canada was greatest among households with children (15.6%), particularly those led by female lone-parents (34.3%). Provincially, Nova Scotia has consistently demonstrated a higher prevalence of food insecurity than the national average (Health Canada, 2007; Health Canada, 2010; Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2013; Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014); with current rates (17.5%) among the highest in the Country (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014)³.

When comparing geographical locations, rates of food insecurity tend to be (generally) higher in urban centers versus rural communities. Notable, in 2012, Halifax had the highest rates of food insecurity of any metropolitan cities in Canada (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014) – representing a statistically significant change in prevalence from that measured in 2007-2008. It should also be noted, however, that these statistics highlight national trends; the most recent provincial analysis of the CCHS data completed for Nova Scotia suggests that in 2005, the

³ While it is possible that these changes can be partially explained by the increased national prevalence of this issue, this discrepancy also represents changes in inclusion data - in terms of the age ranges and characterization of the experience of food insecurity (including measurements of marginal food insecurity) and therefore represents a broader, more encompassing (and arguably, more accurate) spectrum of those affected by this issue (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014).

greatest proportion of food insecure households lived in rural (not urban) communities. What's more, these data identified the Annapolis Valley region of Nova Scotia (a predominantly rural community and the area of focus for this thesis) as the only region in Nova Scotia with rates of food insecurity significantly higher than the provincial average (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Concerns of food insecurity and poverty in rural communities has been raised by Coulhan (2013) and others (Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Projects, 2012; Drouin, Hamelin, & Ouellet, 2009; Pouliot & Hamelin, 2009; Williams et al., 2012a; Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition, 2012) who suggest, these individuals face a breadth of economic and social disadvantage, including varied availability and accessibility to food and community-based services, poorer income, education and employment opportunities and lesser access to transportation. In light of the evidence, the alarming rates of food insecurity reported in the Halifax region should draw equal (if not greater) concern for the barriers to food access faced by those living in isolated communities in this province.

2.2 Food Security and Food Insecurity

Food security is a multi-faceted concept, warranting many interpretations and approaches. The basis of concerns with food security can be traced back to the world food crisis of the mid-1970s (Clay, 2002) and perhaps beyond that, to at least the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the right to food was recognized as a necessary component of an adequate standard of living (Maxwell & Smith, 1992). As this topic has grown, it has also become more complex. This is best reflected in the number of levels in which food security can be considered, including that of individuals, households, communities, regions, nations (Tarasuk, 2001c), and more recently, cultures (Power, 2008), and the near 200 definitions of this concept said to exist in research and policy use (Maxwell & Smith, 1992).

As proposed by Power (2005) in the Dietitians of Canada's position paper on individual and household food security in Canada – "*the way we understand and define an issue is critical in determining how we approach the solutions to address it*" (pg 2). For the purpose of this thesis paper, food security will be defined using a combination of definitions proposed by Canada's Action Plan for Food Security (1998) and Anderson (1990). Modeled after MacAulay (2005), these definitions have been chosen as to reflect a social justice or anti-poverty (versus sustainable food systems) approach to promoting food security in Canada; a perspective based on the premise that Canada has an adequate food supply, and that food insecurity in Nova Scotia arises in the context of people's lack of access to food (Power, 1999). Household and individual food security (the primary focus of this thesis), also referred to as income-related food security, will be defined as *a situation in which, all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life* (Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, 1998) [and includes] *assured ability to acquire these foods in socially acceptable ways* (Anderson, 1990). At the same levels, food insecurity will be defined as *a situation that occurs whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain* (Anderson, 1990).

2.3 Determinants of Food Insecurity

The ability to access the foods one needs to achieve an '*active and healthy life*' is dependent on a variety of factors. In a market economy such as Canada, however, where food acquisition is mediated through a cash exchange (Morton, Bitto, Oakland & Sand, 2008), income remains the most significant and powerful determinant of both food insecurity and hunger. Supporting this, is a myriad of research that demonstrates a strong relationship between income

and measures of household food insecurity (Health Canada, 2007; Health Canada, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2003; Tarasuk, 2001a; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a; Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014) – including that which indicates the likelihood and severity of food insecurity increasing as household income adequacy declines (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a; Health Canada, 2007; Health Canada, 2010; Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013c). It is from this perspective that food insecurity in Canada has come to be understood as a reflection of our current neo-liberal ideologies (and corresponding policies) that contribute to ideas of individualism, free markets and subsequently, unequal access to resources, including food.

Once considered a welfare state, the past decade has been depicted by significant, and in many cases, unfavorable transformations to Canada's economic and socio-political systems (Tarasuk & Davis, 1996; Riches, 1997; Phillips, 2012). Predominantly, this has included shifts in Canada's employment conditions, including an expansive peripheral or 'non-standard' job market of self, part-time and temporary employment, has meant less stable working conditions for many Canadians (Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003), particularly young adults and women and those living in Nova Scotia (Buott, Haiven & Haiven, 2012). Critically, while ensuring stable employment is critical, recent research suggests that employable income does not always eliminate food insecurity for a significant proportion of Canadian households (McIntyre, Bartoo & Emerya, 2014). These findings do not contest the conceptualization of food insecurity as an "economic condition", rather, they challenge the ways in which we frame and approach solutions to addressing this issue long-term, where access to opportunities that provide adequate and stable income (not simply employment) becomes a central focus of efforts to ensure food access (McIntyre, Bartoo & Emerya, 2014).

In addition to employment conditions, the devolution of federal support programs has also meant more stringent eligibility criteria for welfare recipients (Power, 2005; Weavera, Habibova & Fanb, 2010), while recurrent restructuring of social policy has led to an overall reduction in social service expenditures (Power, 2005; Rideout, Riches, Ostry, Buckingham & MacRae, 2007; Phillips, 2012) and a redirected focus of welfare services from that of “guaranteed income” to the “self-sufficiency” and “employability” of individuals (Baker, 1997). Cumulatively, such deteriorations to Canada’s social safety net have served as a major contributor to deepening levels of poverty and increasing rates of food insecurity, at both the national and provincial level (Weavera, Habibova & Fanb, 2010; Rideout, Riches, Ostry, Buckingham & MacRae, 2007).

2.4 Food Insecurity: Concepts and Frameworks

Overall, our understandings of food insecurity and hunger have come from a broad range of research studies, mostly qualitative, focusing on the food-related experiences of low-income individuals (Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht, 2002), primarily women (Radimer, 1990; Williams, et al., 2012a; McIntyre & Glanville, 2010). In particular, the work of Radimer and colleagues (1990) has been foundational in shaping our understanding of the concept of food insecurity and hunger among this population group (Radimer, 1990). Using an in-depth interview approach, Radimer et al. (1990) recognized two dimensions to the experience of hunger among women with children - the individual and household – each of which he further divided into four descriptive components (the quantitative, qualitative, psychological and social). As Radimer et al. (1990) discern, food insecurity is characterized at the individual level by insufficient food intakes (*quantitative component*), diet inadequacy (*qualitative component*), disrupted eating patterns (*social component*) and an interpretation of these experiences as problematic, incited by

feelings of being deprived and/or without choice in eating this way (*psychological component*). Similarly, at the household level, food insecurity can be characterized by the depletion of food resources (*quantitative component*), unsuitable food intake (*qualitative component*), anxiety or uncertainty over a household's food supplies (*psychological component*), with the interpretation of these elements as particularly concerning if foods are acquired in what is perceived to be socially acceptable (or unacceptable) ways (*social component*) (Radimer, 1990).

Building on the work of Radimer et al. (1990), Hamelin and colleagues (2002) completed a qualitative study of the experience of food insecurity through examinations of the perspectives of 98 low-income households in Quebec. Notably, the results from this research helped to distinguish differences between what was initially thought to be the *core components* of food insecurity and what has now come to be understood as the subsequent reactions and potential consequences that correspond with the occurrence and experience of this issue. Based on their findings, Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht (2002) proposed a more flexible characterization of food insecurity, applicable to both individuals and households and across diversified population groups. Overall, their framework emphasizes the necessity for sufficient foods in the present and the future, and the need for individuals to gain control over their food situations - not only to meet their basic needs, but also to achieve self-respect and social integration (Hamelin, 2002). While many of the themes emerging through Hamelin et al.'s (2002) work corresponded with the previous findings of Radimer et al. (1990), important differentiations are made in their depiction in relation to the monotony of the diet and the extremity of alienation of individuals as an emergent concern (Hamelin et al., 2002).

More recently, research has also provided a more detailed look into the dimensions of the experience of food insecurity as described by women involved in CPNP- and CAPC- funded

Family Resource Centres/Projects throughout Nova Scotia (Williams et al., 2012a). Through a process of structured dialogues, these women shared details of their everyday struggles in accessing enough food for themselves and their families. These stories informed the development and understanding of four interrelated themes that emerged as central to their experience: *(1) the struggle to obtain nutritious food; (2) the lack of supports within governing systems; (3) the feelings of being judged by service providers and the public; and (4) the stresses associated with food insecurity and its impacts.* For these women, the supportive environment needed to achieve food security was largely absent; further substantiating the conceptualization of this issue as a reflection of our current economic and social-cultural climate – with influences and implications at the personal, organizational, political and ideological levels (Williams et al., 2012a). Indeed, the interrelations of these themes to Hamelin et. al.'s (2002) depiction of food insecurity is apparent, further contributing to a growing and deepening understanding of what it means to be food insecure in Canada.

Interestingly, the experience of food insecurity has also been explicated through explorations of the challenges faced by low-income populations groups relative to their ability to access enough milk (given its importance as part of providing a healthy diet) for themselves and their families. Through qualitative investigations, McIntyre, Williams and Glanville (2007) found that for a population of low-income, lone-mothers in Atlantic Canada, milk is perceived as an elite commodity, vital to health and a source of stress and anxiety when access is limited. For these mothers, milk had an emotive impact unlike any other food. It was, as the authors propose, *a social marker, an aesthetic experience, a source of meaning and a metaphor for the lives of these women*; a way in which they conveyed their “*life struggles*” (Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010). In further investigations of this same sample, Williams, McIntyre & Glanville

(2010) revealed that among these low-income, lone-mothers, poor access to milk is characterized by a complex set of challenges, stressors, and coping strategies that can be understood in relation to Radimer et. al.'s (1990) proposed dimensions of individual and household food insecurity and each of their four respective components (*quantitative, qualitative, psychological, and social*). Based on this association, researchers proposed the term '*Milk Insecurity*' to define this phenomenon as a distinct feature of food insecurity among this group of low-income, lone-mothers (Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010).

It must be noted that while the core concept of food insecurity is understood in terms of complete deprivation of one's basic need for food (Radimer et al., 1990), it is further defined in terms of frequency, periodicity, and duration (Tarasuk, 2001c; Hamelin et al., 2002) and has come to be understood as a managed process (Radimer, 1990; Tarasuk, 2001c; Hamelin et al., 2002). Temporal patterns of food insecurity are intimately linked to patterns of household resource constraint (Tarasuk, 2001c; Hamelin et al., 2002). For example, Tarasuk (2001c) suggests that a household may experience food insecurity on an ongoing basis if they are continually faced with circumstances in which the inflows of monetary resources are simply insufficient to meet their household's basic needs. Alternatively, she signifies that for others, food insecurity can be episodic and acute in nature, such that the sudden loss of revenue or escalation of household expenses leaves a family temporarily devoid of the financial resources necessary to purchase enough nutritious food (Tarasuk, 2001c). In both cases, the limited access to food arises within the context of complex and competing demands for scarce resources (Hamelin et al., 2002). Faced with difficult and seemingly '*impossible decisions*' relative to resource allocation (Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010), households will often forgo food in order to free up money for other, more inflexible household expenses. As a result, in the

presence of economic constraint, expenses such as housing and utilities have great influence on the severity, frequency and duration of one's experience with food insecurity (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2011). At the same time, as the severity of food insecurity increases, so do the odds of experiencing challenges paying rent and bills or having to up services and/or pawn possessions (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013b). Indeed, the reciprocal relationship between food insecurity and the experience of material hardships is becoming increasingly evident in the literature.

As a managed process, individuals experiencing food insecurity will often employ several coping strategies to augment their food budget and help stretch their household food supplies. In addition to the use of charitable food assistance programs, food insecure women report seeking help from relatives and friends (McIntyre, Connor & Warren, 2000), sending children to a friend or relative's home for a meal, delaying payment of bills, giving up services such as telephone and cable television, or selling/pawning possessions in order to garner more money for food and/or to prepare for impending food shortages (Tarasuk, 2001b). Other management strategies employed by women relate exclusively to the ways in which resources are distributed at the inter-household level (Tarasuk, 2001c). In their descriptions of the experience of food insecurity and hunger, Radimer et al. (1990) first observed several coping tactics employed by women aimed to delay or avoid the components of hunger for their children. These findings have since been reiterated in more recent descriptions of low-income mothers experiences with poverty and food insecurity – in which they will often report depriving themselves of food in order to first preserve the quantity and quality of their children's diet (McIntyre et al., 2000; McIntyre, Officer & Robinson, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2002; Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010).

Evidence of maternal sacrifice is further provided through research with low-income, lone-mothers and their children in Atlantic Canada⁴, where dietary assessments indicate that the nutrient intakes of these mothers were significantly and consistently poorer than that of their children overall, and over a one-month period (including intakes of Vitamin A, C, B6, and B12, Riboflavin, Thiamin, Folate, Iron and Zinc) (McIntyre et al., 2003; Glanville & McIntyre, 2006). It is also demonstrated through exploration of the challenges faced by low-income lone-mothers living in Nova Scotia in accessing enough milk for themselves and their families; all mothers interviewed reported sacrificing their own milk needs and wants so that their children could have more (Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010). More concerning, was the fact that that in that same study, mother's deprivation of milk was understood as more than just short term; they were well aware of the health benefits of adequate milk consumption, and clearly recognized that part of the sacrifice to provide more milk for their children was their own future health (Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010). Although these findings relate specifically to the management and allocation of food and nutrients, research by McIntyre, Officer, & Robinson (2003) suggest that maternal deprivation extends beyond the realm of food, to include the denial of clothes and other small luxuries. In that study, McIntyre and colleagues (2003) observed that mothers would often describe such acts of self-sacrifice as a socially acceptable parental role for those of all income levels; encapsulated in the following quote by one low-income mother participant, who stated "*it is not just poor moms who put kids first*" (McIntyre, Officer, & Robinson, 2003, pg. 321) – a poignant difference being that mothers not experiencing situations of poverty or resource constraint have more "room" in their material capabilities to sacrifice.

⁴ This sample of low-income women in Atlantic Canada has been used to inform multiple analyses and published reports (McIntyre et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010)

2.5 Women, Poverty and Food Insecurity

Around the world, the feminization of poverty or ‘the gender-desegregated denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human life’ (Fukuda-Parr, 1999), is a common reality. Despite converging trends, the prevalence of low-income in Canada has, historically, always been higher among women than that of men (Statistics Canada, 2014). Statistical data also suggests a gender variation in the duration and persistence of poverty, with a higher proportion of Canadian women (4.5%) than men (3.8%) living below the low-income cut-off for at least four out of six years between 2005 and 2010 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). In her critical analysis of the World Economic Forum report, McInturff (2013) further highlights this pervasive discrepancy. She suggests that in the past decade, the economic gender gap score for Canada has inched forward at less than .3% a year, from .728 to .788 (with 1.0 representing no gap between women and men). Most concerning is her statement on Canada’s abysmal progress, in which she notes that *at this rate, it will take at least 228 years for Canadians to reach economic equality across gender groups* (McInturff, 2013).

In Nova Scotia, 16.3% of women aged 18 years or older were reported to be living below the poverty line in 1998; compared to 11.4% of men of the same age group. Nearly 10 years later, these rates have declined to 8.6% and 7.8%, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2008), suggestive of a potentially lessening gap. Such decreases, however, should be interpreted with caution, given that the aforementioned statistics represent income information provided by survey respondents in 2007 – the last full year of strong economic growth in Canada before the downturn of the recession in 2008 (Townsen, 2009). In fact, Statistics Canada described the overall rates of poverty experienced by Canadians during this year as the lowest on record in nearly thirty years (Townsen, 2009). As Townsen (2009) suggests, estimates of the rates of

poverty in Canada *will most certainly increase once the impact of the recession is factored in* – this raises serious questions as to whether our most recent available statistics reflect the extent of poverty currently experienced among women in Canada. What’s more, these numbers describe the general trends in poverty rates among women in Canada; they do not illustrate the specific differences and discrepancies among household-types in which poverty is shown to be most prominent. For example, in 2007, despite record low rates of poverty nationwide, female lone-parent families still experienced rates of poverty as high as 19.9%; almost five times that reported among couple-led families in the same year (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Given its close relation to low-income, it is not surprising that in Canada, the prevalence of food insecurity in Canada is similarly more pronounced among women than men. Not only are women of all ages more likely to live in households characterized as food insecure (Statistics Canada, 2013; Matheson & McIntyre, 2013), they also represent a greater proportion of lone-parent families in Nova Scotia (13.9%) (Government of Nova Scotia, 2011) - a population group with consistently high rates of reported food insecurity (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014). According to the most recent statistics (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014), the prevalence of food insecurity among households led by female lone-parents (34.3%) was two times greater than among households led by male lone parents (17.2%) and almost three times that of households led by couples (11.7%). Corroborating population-level data, are regional estimates derived from another, albeit proceeding, analysis of the same sample of 141 low-income, lone-mothers living in one of the four Atlantic Provinces previously described in studies by McIntyre, et al. (2002) and Glanville and McIntyre (2006). In the instance of McIntyre et. al.’s (2002) work, the Cornell-Radimer Questionnaire was used to assess the occurrence of food security and hunger over the past year among this population group. Given that income assistance (welfare)

was named as the primary source of income for a near 90% of women studied, as expected, the experience of food insecurity over the past year was virtually universal across this group; with food insecurity occurring in an astonishing 96.5% of women and their families. Interestingly, upon the use of stepwise multiple logistic regressions, one of two independent predictors of child or maternal hunger over the past year were Nova Scotia residency (McIntyre et al., 2002).

2.6 Women, Poverty and Food Insecurity: A Critical Perspective

A critical approach to women's poverty begins with the premise that pervasive gender inequalities and biases within households, labor markets and socio-political systems render women more vulnerable to poverty than men. Despite efforts to achieve equality within these systems, gender disparities still exist in Canada and Nova Scotia. This is illustrated not only through significant gaps in men's and women's earnings, but also in the positions in which women are most likely to be employed (Townson, 2009). Women are three times more likely than men to be working part-time in Canada (Townson, 2009), while Nova Scotian women represent nearly 66% of all minimum wage earners (Saulnier, 2009). The number of women working for minimum wage earnings is of particular concern, given that in these employment conditions women are likely to be paid just over \$10 an hour (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014), placing their wages below Canada's unofficial poverty line (as indicated by Canada's after-tax Low-Income Cut Off s (LICO)) (Buott, Haiven & Haiven, 2012).

Largely contributing to, and further increasing women's vulnerability to experiencing poverty are female gender roles, which have led to the construction and social expectation of caring as central to women's identities (Devault, 1991). As such, women are often responsible for a disproportionate amount of what Devault (1991) has described as 'caring work', including not only domestic labor, but also caring for husbands, children, elderly relations as well as

neighbors and friends through informal volunteerism or work exchange (Devault, 1991). Although these unpaid activities have long sustained life and community, and have for many, been a source of deep satisfaction and pride, they have also served to constrain and oppress women (Devault, 1991). As Devault (1991) suggests, participation in caring work often requires the suppression of other capacities and desires; not excluding a reduction in the time women have available to devote to furthering their education (Ross, 2006), securing gainful employment and earning incomes (Ross, 2006; Pressman, 2003). It also can also prevent women from taking jobs with longer hours or substantial travel - jobs, which of course, are also likely to come with higher pay (Pressman, 2003). While the promotion of paid employment is consistent with liberal feminist views that participation into the paid workforce is key to women's emancipation, Power (2005b) importantly notes that it is this same perception (the promotion of individual's responsibility to find work), that has *positioned the burden and responsibility of poverty with individual women and promoted only one route for its amelioration* (pg. 656). Therefore, it is important to remain conscientious that despite being necessary in the attainment of gender equality, the notion that it is *through work and consumption that members of contemporary western industrialized societies – including women – reach full citizenship* (Power, 2005b, pg. 656), is undoubtedly an ideology fueled by a consumer, neoliberal society; one which does not recognize, nor merit the unpaid work many women are already doing raising children (Power, 2005).

Through this same lens, issues of food insecurity become closely linked to gender and class relations, not only as a manifestation of dominance and oppression which impede women's' ability to make an adequate standard of living, but also in the organization of family relations, in which feeding is viewed as an important part of women's "caring work" (Devault,

1991). As indicated by Devault (1991), women relate feeding and meal preparation to expressions of love and devotion to their families and the symbolic meaning of food, including its expressive use by all family members, is significant. However, Devault (1991) also suggests that the asymmetric divisions in the act of “*feeding the family*” can serve to reinforce a gender distinction in which the service of giving is inherently womanly, and the role of receiving is the function of men. As a result, blame associated with the inability to provide one’s family with enough healthy foods becomes heavily weighted on women. These sentiments are captured in Power’s study in 2005b, where lone-mothers living in poverty described the worry and anxiety they felt in relation to their inability to provide their children with a “*normal*” childhood, both in comparison with those around them, and to their own standards of acceptability. For these women, the inability to meet such standards provided them with a sense of failure as a mother. This is exemplified in an interview with one woman (given the fictitious name Irene), whom Power (2005b) described would console herself that her children had what they “*needed for survival*”. However, in further descriptions of the context of this interview, Power (2005b) noted that “*between the lines of her words was a sense that she felt she had fallen short of what she would like and ‘should’ be able to provide for them*” (pg. 652). In locating such blame on individuals rather than on the broader systems and structures in which the family is embedded, Devault (1991) notes that these discourses further contribute to the legitimization of hierarchies that produce inequitable access to resources, or in this case, food (Devault, 1991).

2.7 Food Insecurity, Income and Health: A Brief Introduction

Food security has been described as a prerequisite for health (McIntyre, 2003), a key strategy in chronic disease prevention (Heart and Stroke Foundation, 2014) and is in and of itself a recognized social determinant of health (McIntyre & Tarasuk, 2004; Mikkonen & Raphael,

2010). It is also directly linked to the most important determinants of health - income and social status (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). While mixed interactions between income, food insecurity and other social determinants make it difficult to fully understand the independent effect of these factors on health status, a wealth of evidence does suggest that income inadequacy and food insecurity have negative and interrelated impacts on the health and well-being of Canadians. Population-based data tell us that low-income Canadian adults have higher rates of mortality and morbidity and are more likely to die at an earlier age than those Canadians of higher-income brackets - regardless of age, sex, race, and place of residence (McIntosh, Finès, Wilkins & Wolfson, 2009). Similarly, other research suggests that households reporting food insecurity are more likely to report poor or fair self-rated health, poor functional health, restricted activity and multiple chronic conditions compared to their food secure counterparts (McIntyre et al., 2000; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a; Che & Chen, 2001).

In addition to poor health outcomes, investigations into the consumption patterns of Canadians reveal potential associations between food security status, income level and nutritional adequacy of one's diet. Analyses of population-based health data in Canada indicate that food insecurity is systematically linked to lower nutrient intakes and higher estimated prevalence of nutrient inadequacy among adolescents and adults, including marked differences in protein, fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate, vitamin B12, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, and iron (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2008). Low intakes of these nutrients correspond with the limited consumption of certain food groups, particularly milk and milk products and fruits and vegetables (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2008). Loospra and Tarasuk (2013b) have also highlighted the relationship between severity of food insecurity and adequacy of household food supplies of nutrient rich food groups. As their work suggests, when compared

to baseline characteristics, the odds of reporting inadequacies in supplies of milk, vegetables, and fruit increases from 30% to 50% for every two more responses on the Household Food Security Survey Module (a standard tool to measure and characterize food insecurity) answered affirmatively (Loospra & Tarasuk, 2013b). Interestingly, despite purchasing significantly fewer servings of milk products and fruits and vegetables, it has also been observed that low-income households tend to spend a larger proportion of their food budget on these foods than do higher income groups (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2003). This suggests that healthy foods are no less a priority among those with constrained resources, instead, access and availability to healthy food reflects one's socioeconomic position, with strong relations to household income adequacy (Tarasuk, Fitzpatrick and Ward, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2003).

2.7.1 Food Insecurity: Implications on Women's Health and Nutritional Status

As indicated in the above section, food insecurity is undoubtedly a factor influencing women's ability to access a nutritious diet. As household resources deplete, the dietary intakes of low-income women have been shown to exhibit significant declines, though varying in magnitude in conjunction with more severe levels of household food insecurity (Tarasuk, McIntyre & Li, 2007; Tarasuk, 2001a). In comparison to women in households without hunger evident, women in households with severe or moderate hunger tend to fall further below the daily servings recommended by Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (CFGHE) in almost all food groups – with exception of intakes of milk products, in which all groups report very low-intakes (Tarasuk, 2001b). These findings are consistent with subsequent analyses, which indicate that while the intakes of women with moderate or severe food insecurity tend to show significant declines in energy, carbohydrate and fruit and vegetable intakes as household resources diminish, no similar patterns are apparent among those classified as either food secure or marginally food

insecure (Tarasuk, McIntyre & Li, 2007). Based on such findings, Tarasuk, McIntyre & Li (2007) propose that women's food security status reflects their resilience or vulnerability to deteriorations in dietary intakes; with intakes of those characterized by more severe levels of food insecurity the most sensitive to changes in household economic resources.

Further support of the nutritional implications of food insecurity among women is provided by the analysis of dietary intake among a sample of 141 low-income, lone-mothers living in Atlantic Canada. In that analysis, Glanville and McIntyre (2006) found that when compared to CFGHE, the intakes of almost 95% of mothers did not meet their needs for grains and fruits and vegetables, and a near 80% did not meet their recommended daily intakes of meats and milk products (Glanville & McIntyre, 2006). In addition to this, consistency in measures of low intakes of milk products among food insecure women (Tarasuk, 2001a; Tarasuk, McIntyre & Li, 2007; Glanville & McIntyre, 2006) have set the stage for subsequent research, indicating that low-income women's milk consumption is highly income-sensitive (Glanville & McIntyre, 2009; McIntyre, Williams & Glanville, 2007; Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010). Research examining the beverage consumption of low-income, lone-mother led, "*milk friendly*" families (families in which total milk consumption was 720mL on a single day during the month), shows that women's consumption of milk is highest at the time of the month when they have the most money to spend and declines accordingly as time since last receiving income increases (Glanville & McIntyre, 2009).

Compromised dietary intakes among food insecure women are likely to lead to inadequate intake of a number of important vitamins and minerals. In one of the only analyses of nutrient intakes and household food security status among low-income women in Canada, Tarasuk and Beaton (1999) found that even after consideration for economic, socio-cultural, and

behavioral influences on dietary intakes, women who report hunger in their households have an increased prevalence of inadequacies in excess of 15% for Vitamin A, folate, iron and magnesium (Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999). Moreover, among these women, estimated group mean calcium intakes were shown to be only 75% of the 700 mg/d proposed as suitable by Health Canada at the time that study was completed (Tarasuk and Beaton, 1999). These results are further corroborated by subsequent analyses of these data completed by Tarasuk, McIntyre and Li in 2007. These results highlight marginally significant linear declines in energy, carbohydrate, vitamin B-6 intake calcium by food security status relative to the time since receipt of a monthly income check. It is important to note data from Tarasuk and Beaton's study (1999) reflect the computation patterns, food supply and recommended dietary intakes of Canadians from more than a decade ago; while there are many factors that have undoubtedly changed since this time, more recent explorations of the experience of food insecurity (Williams et al., 2012) suggests that food deprivation and inadequate access to healthy foods remains a defining characteristic of this issue and thus, nutritional inadequacy likely remains a pressing concern.

2.7.2 Diet-Sensitive Chronic Conditions

The nature of illnesses in westernized nations has shifted significantly in this century. Whereas infectious diseases were the major cause of health concern in the 1900s, non-communicable diseases now account for the vast majority of death and disability within the western world (World Health Organization, 2005). It is estimated that four types of chronic illness (including cardiovascular disease, cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes) kill nearly 5,800 Nova Scotians every year and account provincially for nearly three-quarters of all recorded deaths (Colman, 2002). Critically, in Nova Scotia, more women die from

cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) and cancer than any other measured non-communicable illness (Statistics Canada, 2009).

While a myriad of factors can lead to the development of chronic illness, researchers propose that improvements in lifestyle behaviors (which includes adopting healthier eating patterns) plays a strong role in disease prevention and can be associated with as much as a 40% reduction in the risk of developing the most common chronic conditions (Colman, 2002). At the same time, research also tells us that the consumption of more nutritious foods is highly sensitive to changes in household financial resources (Ricciuto, Tarasuk & Yatchew, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2003; Tarasuk, McIntyre, & Li, 2007; Tarasuk, Fitzpatrick and Ward, 2010), suggesting that healthy eating is not simply a matter of lifestyle choice for low-income women. The reality is that many low-income Nova Scotians are unable to afford the nutritious foods they need and want, no matter how carefully they may choose or prepare their foods. Since 2002, Provincial Participatory Food Costing data have illustrated that low income individuals and households living in Nova Scotia, including those earning minimum wage (William et.al., 2006; Newell, Williams & Watt, 2014), on public pensions (Green, Williams, Johnson, & Blum, 2008), or income assistance (Williams et al., 2012b) do not have enough money left over to purchase the food necessary to sustain an adequately nutritious diet after other essential expenses (such as shelter, utilities and clothing) are factored in. As an example, in 2012, it was estimated that a female-led lone-parent household with three children between the ages of seven and twelve years would face a deficit of at least \$823.03 each month after purchasing a basic nutritious diet on minimum wage earnings (Newell, Williams & Watt, 2014).

The struggle for low-income women to access enough healthy foods for themselves and their families is also partially related to the comparative cost of more nutritious, with less

nutritious options. In examining the cost of food relative to energy density, analytical research indicates that energy dense foods are not only the least expensive option for consumers (Drewnowski and Specter, 2004), but are also the most resistant to inflation (Monsivais, and Drewnowski, 2007). In their research of the costs relative to diet energy density among low-income women in California, Townsend, Aaron, Monsivais, Keim, and Drewnowski, (2009) found that for every dollar increase in estimated diet cost, diet energy density decreases by 0.94 MJ/ kg (0.225 kcal/g). The lower price of more-energy-dense diets is worrisome, when paired with research, which suggests that these diets often contain more sugar, total fat, and saturated fat and contain less dietary fiber and micronutrients such as vitamins A and C than diets that are less-energy-dense (Townsend, Aaron, Monsivais, Keim, & Drewnowski, 2009) – as well as other research that suggests that women experiencing food insecurity consume a high number of serving of such foods (i.e. carbonated beverages, snack foods, cakes, pastries, etc) (Glanville & McIntyre, 2006; Tarasuk, 2001b).

These findings raise important questions as to the potential for chronic disease prevention strategies that aim to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables to be beneficial for lower-income groups, in which price is the most salient factor influencing food-purchasing behavior (Dachner, Ricciuto, Kirkpatrick, & Tarasuk, 2010). This also speaks to the need for comprehensive approaches to health promotion, such as that outlined in Nova Scotia's Healthy Eating Strategy (Government of Nova Scotia, 2005) and THRIVE!; both provincial strategies include a food security component, acknowledging the barriers that impede availability and accessibility of healthy food choices for Nova Scotians. Acknowledging the interplay of social determinants on healthy food choices and thus, chronic disease prevention and management (Gucciardi, Vogt, DeMelo, & Stewart, 2009; Marjerrison et al., 2011), both the Canadian

Diabetes Association (2014) and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (2013) have released position statements in support of further research and action to help improve food security for all Canadians. Notably, to achieve this goal, one of several recommendations put forth by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (2013) included supporting research such as that completed in this thesis project, which “*examines the impact of community level strategies for increasing access to healthy local foods (e.g., community kitchens, gardens, markets, food policy councils and charters)*” (pg. 3).

2.7.3 Mental, Psychological & Social Health

In addition to compromised physical and nutritional health, the psychological and social consequences of economic disadvantage of food insecurity are numerous. When compared to their food secure equivalents, food insecure women are more likely to report experiences of depressive episodes (Casey et al., 2004; Whitaker, Phillips & Orzol, 2006; Tarasuk, 2001b), generalized anxiety (Whitaker, Phillips & Orzol, 2006) and increased levels of emotional distress (Tarasuk, 2001b). Equally as concerning, are reports from food insecure women in Nova Scotia, describing feelings of stigmatization and judgment from other community members and organizations because of their inability to provide their family with enough healthy foods (Williams et al., 2012a). The feelings expressed among these women correspond with previously indicated research in Canada, which suggests that for at least some low-income households, food insecurity is linked to a clear feeling of being constrained to go against one’s norms and values, and is often related to a number of psychological perturbations such as loss of dignity as well as feelings of sorrow and hurt (Hamelin et al., 2002).

Interrelated to the negative social and psychological reactions of food insecurity, are the experiences described by women living in poverty; including feelings of being deprived, judged

or degraded, guilty, isolated, dependent, and despondent (McIntyre, Officer & Robinson, 2003). Critically, in her study of lone-mothers living on social assistance in rural Nova Scotia, Power (2005b) describes the governing nature of poverty, including the ways in which low-income women living on social assistance are constructed and disciplined as the ‘Other’ - a flawed citizen without the financial resources to participate in a consumer society. Even more troubling, was the awareness among women of Power’s (2005b) study of the negative of ways in which they felt they were being perceived by those around them. These negative perceptions were summed up by the label “*welfare bum*”, which the women of Power’s (2005b) study viewed as referring to someone who was lazy, irresponsible, and who was getting something undeserved (Power, 2005b). Such stigmatization was further voiced by low-income Canadian’s of Reutter et al.’s study in 2009 as well as in William et.al.’s work in 2012(b), where participants spoke of “*being labeled*” and being “*looked at and treated differently*” by others of higher income status. These stereotypes are what Reutter et al. (2009) describe as both overt and covert, encompassing both the perception and enactment of stigmatization experienced among these participants. For these low-income households, stigmatization was perceived to have severe consequences on their mental health; exemplified through reported feelings of depression and low self-esteem arising in the context of feeling inadequate and not being cared for or respected by others (Reutter et al., 2009).

In response to such stigma, much like the strategies previously discussed in relation to coping with food insecurity (McIntyre, Connor & Warren, 2000; Tarasuk, 2001b), participants of Reutter et. al.’s (2009) study employed a number of tactics to protect themselves from the negative implications of poverty. This included disregarding responses from others, withdrawing or self- isolating themselves from others, engaging in cognitive distancing and employing efforts

to conceal their financial situation. However, despite such attempts to counteract and reconcile their experiences, Reutter et al. (2009) note that such coping strategies are likely to contribute to further social exclusion of these individuals from mainstream society – resulting in added detriments to their health and well-being.

2.8 Responses to Food Insecurity in Canada

While many initiatives have been established to address food insecurity in Canada, charitable food assistance programs, in the form of food banks, were the first, and are arguably still, the most pervasive response to food insecurity and hunger in this Country (Tarasuk, 2001a; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Tarasuk, 2009; Power, 2005). Although initially instituted as a temporary food relief operation during the post-war recession of the 1980's (Tarasuk, 2005; Riches, 2002; Riches 1997), charitable food assistance did not diminish as Canada's economy improved (Tarasuk, 2001a; Tarasuk, 2005). Instead, the next several decades would be marked by the proliferation (Tarasuk, 2005; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2009), institutionalization (Riches, 2002; Tarasuk, 2005) and eventual entrenchment of food banks in Canada (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen & Skinner, 2012). This “*charitable safety net*” (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen & Skinner, 2012) has been long argued by researchers as further enabling state retrenchment (Tarasuk, 2001; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003); under the veil and social construction of these programs as a response (in principle) to hunger.

Studies depicting food bank usage suggest it is often a last resort for low-income families (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012); an observation closely tied to the feelings of shame, embarrassment, humiliation and degradation (Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht, 2002; Gaetz, Tarasuk, Dachner & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012d) associated with the use of these services. It can also have damaging effects on social cohesion,

dividing society into “*have*” and “*have not’s*” (Power, 2005) through the establishment of a two-tiered food system; market based for those who can afford it and subsistence-based for those who cannot (Power, 1999). Furthermore, there are research to suggest that foods distributed by food banks are often of poor quality, damaged or expired (Teron & Tarasuk, 1999; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012d), further undermining the dignity of those who utilize them – serving to characterize food banks as a socially unacceptable mode of food acquisition.

In addition to food banks, growing concerns of food insecurity and hunger among low-income families in Canada has prompted the initiation of a number of charitable food assistance programs specifically targeted at children. Unlike the United States where support for the implementation of school feeding programs is nationally legislated (Kennedy & Cooney, 2001), there are currently no federally mandated policies related to feeding children in schools or communities in Canada (Dayle, McIntyre & Travers, 2000). As such, the proliferation of these food-based initiatives, including emerging child-focused meal and snack programs in schools, churches and community centers (McIntyre, Travers & Dayle, 1999), has largely occurred through localized volunteer efforts (Dayle, McIntyre and Raine-Travers, 2000). Much like food banks, researchers from Atlantic Canada have documented the process by which children’s feeding programs have become ‘institutionalized’ - characterized by their dependence on the state for funding, a concern for program sustainability, the career interests of workers in these programs and the competition with others for scarce resources (McIntyre, Raine & Dayle, 2001).

An increase in the number of children’s feeding programs throughout the county has also led to examinations of the effectiveness and appropriateness of these strategies as a response to food insecurity and child hunger. In 1999, McIntyre, Travers and Dayle applied qualitative approaches to the examination of a sample of nine children’s feeding programs in the Atlantic

Provinces; including participant observation and group/individuals interviews with program operators, volunteers, staff, administrators, board members as well as participating children and their parents. Results from this study showed that despite their positive intentions to promote ideologies of equality and family, children's feeding programs have the potential to *reproduce, rather than reduce, inequities* by their "dragnet" functioning, or the ways in which they keep people in a permanently needy or dependent state. Ultimately, as the researchers of this study suggest, this has the potential to disempower individuals through a process by which their lives become managed by others (McIntyre, Raine and Dayle, 1999). Building on this concept in further analyses of the same data sample, Dayle, McIntyre and Raine-Travers (2000) suggest that the "*dragnet*" of these programs continues as new services are added and the primary purpose of these initiatives– to provide children with healthy foods – succumbs to the desire for efficiency and maintenance of the program itself long-term.

Despite their unintended negative effects, Williams, McIntyre, Dayle & Raine (2003) illustrate a paradox of the ways in which children's feeding programs are still perceived as "*wonderful*" by those who implement and utilize them. As these authors suggest, the overtly positive perception of children's feeding programs is innately built into their program design, in that they are *community-and charity-based, support a noble cause such as the elimination of child hunger, engage good people as donors and volunteers, and provide a direct service to children apart from their families* (Williams, McIntyre, Dayle & Raine, 2003, pg. 169).

Accordingly, Williams, McIntyre, Dayle and Raine (2003) challenge health promoters to critically examine the "*wonderfulness*" of child-feeding programs, as well as other strategies which are similarly framed; as to not ignore the potential negative impacts of these programs. Overall, while the dragnet and design of child feeding programs undoubtedly *creates the illusion*

of feeding hungry children ad hoc charitable programs, no matter how well intentioned, are inadequate to address the problem of child hunger in Canada (Dayle, McIntyre and Raine-Travers, 2000).

The understanding of food insecurity as an ongoing, rather than transitory problem, coupled with growing concerns of the inadequacy of the charitable food assistance model in addressing this issue long term, has led to the pursuit of alternative (Tarasuk, 2001a), and more comprehensive responses. It is within this context, that activists began to promote the approach of community food security⁵ (CFS) in 1994 (Allen, 1999); framing food issues within a broader scope -adopting the same basic principles of anti-hunger and income-related food insecurity initiatives, but merging this with sustainable food systems perspectives, as to emphasize long-term approaches that promote individual empowerment, community development and address food security for *all* community members (Hamms & Bellows, 2003). As a concept, CFS expands on previous definitions of food security, sharing views of health, sustainability, social justice, and community self-reliance, but shifting the focus to communities of households and individuals, not just the latter two, through a predominantly local food systems approach (Hamm & Bellows, 2003).

Strategies framed within this movement are rooted in disciplines of community nutrition, nutrition education, public health, sustainable agriculture, and community development (Kantor, 2001). In adopting this approach, these initiatives seek longer lasting solutions to issues of food insecurity, and through their focus on capacity building and community self-reliance, claim an ‘alternative’ to the traditional charitable food assistance model (Tarasuk, 2001a). Examples of

⁵ Community food security is defined as a situation in which “all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, pg 37).

these types programs include food-buying clubs, farmers' markets, alternative food distribution networks, community-supported agriculture, and community or school-based food gardens (Tarasuk, 2001a; Kantor, 2001). In Canada, primary research and systematic reviews have explored the impacts of school food gardens backyard gardening programs and community-based programs from a community-food security and food systems perspective (Kortright & Wakefield, 2010; Carlsson & Williams, 2009; Brown et al., 2005) few studies have examined how these responses impact food security from an individual/household food security or social justice lens. In the next section, what research is available from the latter perspective will be presented, as to provide insight into the effectiveness of community-based food programs as a strategy to address individual and household food insecurity in Canada.

2.8.1 Critical Examinations of Community-Based Strategies to Household Food Security

Overall, the body of peer-reviewed research examining the contributions of community-based food programs to household food security is limited, providing a rationale for further research in this area. An inherent similarity, and potential limitation of much of this body of research are the ways in which these studies have conceptualized the contributions of community-based programs to household food security; using material and economic indicators as a key marker of these programs potential to alter an individual or household's food security status (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b).

In 1999, Tarasuk and Reynolds embarked on a qualitative study to examine the potential for community kitchens to affect income-related food insecurity among households with constrained resources in Toronto. Despite their many positive attributes, findings from this study suggest that community kitchens do not provide substantial material benefits to participants - with meals prepared in these kitchens contributing to less than 17% of household supper meals

and less than 5% of household monthly food needs. In addition to this, the cost-sensitive nature of low-income families' participation in this type of community-based food programs is elucidated in instances where the introduction of participant fees by kitchens resulted in the withdrawal of participants unable to afford these costs and the systematic replacement of these participants with those of higher income levels. Based on their findings, the authors of this study propose that, despite their potential to enhance coping skills and provide individuals with valuable support, community kitchens are limited in their ability to resolve issues of food security issues that are rooted in chronic poverty, given their poor contributions to families overall household economic circumstance (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999).

More recent investigations of community kitchen programs in Canada draw similar conclusions to those put forth by Tarasuk and Reynolds (1999); that community-based programs, such as community-kitchens lack the capacity to resolve the underlying issue, and do not replace the need for fundamental social change to increase food security among the Canadian population long-term (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum, 2007; Milligan, 2010). This was evident in Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum's (2007) pan-Canadian qualitative exploration of community kitchens, in which interviewees living with less severe food insecurity primarily described community kitchens as a tool for making ends meet and a strategy for avoiding using a food bank or other undignified means of coping with limited resources – rather than a resource that helped them to overcome or ameliorate circumstances of poverty and food insecurity. It was also a common thread through Milligan's (2010) doctoral research, where despite their countless social, educational and nutritional benefits, the “Cooking Fun for Families” community kitchen programs central to her investigations in the city of Vancouver, did not show any significant political or economic impacts for participating families, nor was political action an explicit or

implicit goal of the program. As Milligan (2010) concluded, it is unlikely that community-kitchens contribute substantially to the social change needed to resolve issues of poverty and food insecurity that the clientele of these programs are living with.

Keeping with an economic-based assessment, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)-funded projects and child nutrition programs were the focus of a study by Vozoris and Tarasuk (2003b), where the effects of program participation were measured in relation to its impact on household financial circumstances, and thus, food security for low-income families. Of the programs analyzed, only food supplements and vouchers were considered to contribute to individual participants' food needs and household food costs. These items were therefore the central focus in determining and quantifying the financial contributions of the CPNP-funded project and child nutrition program participation for low-income families. Basing their analysis on the inputs and expenditures of four hypothetical welfare-supported households assumed to be living in Toronto in 1999, Vozoris and Tarasuk (2003b) found that despite representing 21.2% or 37.6% of the estimated total monthly food needs based on cost (depending on whether a \$5 or \$10 food voucher was provided weekly), food supplement and food vouchers, offered through CPNP program participation, were insufficient to offset the deficits in monthly household income (these program components accounted for only \$27.92 or \$49.57 of the estimated \$255.46 deficit that welfare recipients face every month) for a single pregnant women in her first trimester. As was concluded in preceding findings on community kitchens, the contribution of prenatal and child nutrition programs to households' overall financial situations were suggested to be minimal. Thus, authors of this study further suggest it is unlikely that these programs are able to alleviate household food insecurity, which is inextricable to income inadequacy.

In 2001(b), Tarasuk completed a more comprehensive examination of community-based responses to household food security in Canada; drawing upon her and Reynolds (1999) previous findings on community kitchens to inform more a generalized discussion of other approaches to food security that fall within the realm of community development (i.e. those designed to foster self-help and mutual support and/or promote local-level alternative food production and distribution). In her analysis, Tarasuk (2001b) raises important questions as to the capacity of ad-hoc, community-based programs to overcome or alter systems of poverty that underpin food insecurity in Canada. Tarasuk (2001b) suggests that, of many things, the self-help orientation of community-development programs, as well as their focus on food-skills and alternative food acquisition, may act to depoliticize the issue of food insecurity by fueling the perception that food insecurity is an issue related to the poor management of, rather than unequal access to, resources. As a result, the need for fundamental social change the systemic issues of inequality and inequity may be largely downplayed. In addition to this, because community-based strategies have largely originated from the public and social sectors, it is postulated that these programs tend to work within the origins that they have derived - helping people better cope with their poverty - rather than focusing on activities that challenge the state and address the structures that maintain issues of food insecurity. This, as Wakefield et. al.'s (2013) recent work suggests, is reflective of how state resources have been redeployed (government funding accounted for a substantial amount [40%] of the revenue garnered by community organizations studied) in neoliberal restructuring. Although recognizing the importance of community-based food programs in terms of the fostering of a more sustainable food system, Tarasuk (2001b) suggests that the most effective responses to income-related food security are not those focused on food behaviors, but those that improve economic conditions for poor households, albeit signifying the

need for more work in the identification of strategies that may ameliorate issues of food access (Tarasuk, 2001b).

Complementary to evidence-based critiques and assessments which suggest that community-based food programs may be an inadequate response to household food security, researchers have begun to query the appropriateness of community-based food programs in terms of their utilization by the population groups they set forth to assist. In their survey-based study of low-income families residing in high poverty neighborhoods in Toronto, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) found household participation in community-based food programs to be surprisingly low - never exceeding more than one-third of the 484 families sampled. In fact, participation in community gardens and kitchens were observed to be so low that associations between participation in these programs and household food security status could not be analyzed. Notably, a number of families did report regular participation in child-food programs through schools or community agencies, however, upon analysis; no significant associations were indicated between household participation in these programs and household food security status or household socio-demographic characteristics. Complementing their statistical analysis, Loopstra and Tarasuk (2013a) further explored the reasons for low-rates of participation among these families using an in-depth interview process. Their results highlight lack of accessibility (i.e. knowledge of how and where to participate) and fit (i.e. suited to meet their needs, interests and schedule) as key determinants of non-participation in these programs.

Based on these data, both Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) and Loopstra and Tarasuk (2013a) challenge the perception that community-based food programs play a valuable role in addressing the unmet food needs of food insecure households, based largely on the premise that these programs are underutilized by those most vulnerable to this situation (Kirkpatrick &

Tarasuk, 2009; Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2013a). It should be noted, however, that these analyses do not include a differentiation between sources of program funding, nor do they indicate programs that support and facilitate participation among vulnerable groups through material or social means. What's more, these studies explore the use of community-based programs among families living in a highly urban center; we cannot assume that these findings are transferrable to rural settings, where both the experiences of food insecurity as well as the dynamics of community-related supports have been differentiated (Coulhan, 2013).

In addition to critical examinations of the contributions of community-based programs to food security, researchers have also drawn attention to potential differences in the perceptions of this issue among households and community stakeholders (i.e., community workers, program managers and representatives from donor agencies) (Hamelin, Mercier & Bedard, 2010). As Hamelin, Mercier and Bedard (2010) illustrate, there are significant divergences in the viewpoints of these groups, particularly in relation to characteristics of food insecurity, relative importance of various risk factors related to food insecurity and the effectiveness of the community assistance to enhance the households' ability to face food insecurity. These discrepancies not only suggest that community-based interventions do not always adequately fit households' needs (and realities of their experiences), they also point to serious implications in the "*implementation of sustainable upstream solutions to food insecurity*" (pg. 411).

Accumulatively, the analyses brought forth in this section support a substantiated argument that community-based programs lack the capacity to alter a household's material circumstance in any substantial way – as evidenced by the lack of exchange of resources, discrepancies in the understanding of the experience of food insecurity and questionable rates of involvement and participation. As such, they raise serious concerns regarding the effectiveness

of food-focused programs and bring to question the capacity of community-based responses to address the chronic poverty and persistent income inadequacy that underlie the experience of food insecurity (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b). Indeed, the need for more political efforts and systemic approaches to address food insecurity in Canada long-term is evident.

2.9 The Benefits of Community-Based Food Programs

Although previous research (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b) has raised important questions relative to the capacity of community-based approaches to address issues the root causes of individual/household food insecurity in Canada, the immediate and potential broader positive outcomes of such programs, including those, which relate directly and indirectly to household food security, remain convincing. Research in this area, however, is limited, with even less examinations being completed in Canada. There are no known studies that examine the contributions of community-based approaches to food security using an ecological lens (in which program and organizational contributions are considered); what is available primarily focuses on the material outcomes of a few types of community-based strategies, namely community kitchen and gardening initiatives.

The following sections will explore some of the potential benefits of participation in community-based food programs, including how these programs may contribute to household food security among low-income families. Given the lack of research in this field, I will draw on insights from available research surrounding one such activity, gardening.

2.9.1 Gardening: Benefits to Physical, Mental and Psychological Health

Despite remaining largely anecdotal in nature, evidence to support gardening as a health promotion strategy is growing. As indicated by emerging research from Canada, as well as that from the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), gardens have the potential to improve health among adults and their families through increased physical activity, improved nutrition, and improved mental wellness (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds & Skinner, 2007; Kortright & Wakefield, 2009; Alaimo, Packnett, Miles & Kruger, 2008; Nanney, Johnson, Elliott. & Haire-Joshu, 2007; Van den Berg et al., 2010; den Berg, Maas, Verheij & Groenewegen, 2010; Van den Berg & Custers, 2011; Nielsen & Hansen, 2007; Gross & Lane, 2007).

In two separate qualitative studies in Canada, participants most often describe gardening (both communal and residential) as a positive contributor to their physical health. Active community gardeners in South East Toronto reported improved access to fresh foods and increased intakes of fresh fruits and vegetables as a central benefit of their participation in gardening (Wakefield et.al, 2007). Similarly residential level gardeners report positive changes in their eating habits because of growing their own food. As one gardener in a similar study by Kortright and Wakefield's (2009) described, "*it [their home garden] does change the way you eat. There's always fresh, you take it, you bring it to the sink with the water, you wash it, and you have fresh salad every day. It does change things; yes, it does*" (Kortright & Wakefield, 2009, pg. 46). Qualitative descriptions of the nutrition and health benefits of gardening are corroborated by studies from the US that link participation in gardening and gardening programs to self-reported improvements in the dietary and nutrient intakes both of primary gardeners as well their non-gardening household members (Alaimo et al., 2008; Nanney, Johnson, Elliott. &

Haire-Joshu, 2007) – suggesting a link between owning a garden and improved nutritional health.

In addition to a myriad of physical health benefits, gardeners will often describe their gardens as calming and relaxing atmospheres, thus contributing to a perceived improvement in their overall mental, emotional and psychological well-being (Wakefield et al., 2007). Previous research indicates that access to private or shared greenery is inversely related to individuals' reported (Nielsen & Hansen, 2007) and biological measures (Van Den Berg & Custers, 2011) of experienced stress – suggesting that in some mechanism, exposure to green space may provide a buffer against stressful life events and their related negative health impacts (Van den Berg, Maas, Verheij & Groenewegen, 2010). In their exploration of the meaning of domestic gardens and of gardening throughout the lifespan, Gross and Lane (2007) completed 15 unstructured interviews with a diverse group of domestic gardeners aged 18 to 85 years. Through the accounts and experiences of participants, themes of escapism, ownership, identity, and relationships emerged. Participants described gardening as an escapist activity, in which they were able to become completely absorbed in their gardens and as a result, mentally disengage. By means of gardening, participants were able to escape from unwanted worries, anxieties or thoughts. Thus, the garden became a place actively sought by participants for contemplation and avoidance of stress, a place where they were able to handle concerns or emotions either through addressing them or by disengaging from them (Gross & Lane, 2007).

2.9.2 Gardening: Empowerment and Social Capital

When examining the potential social benefits of gardening, the weight of evidence centers around gardens in a communal, rather than an individual setting, although very few empirical studies have addressed this topic overall. As a setting that brings together people from

different social circles bound by a mutual interest in gardening, friendship building is often a welcomed byproduct of participation in community gardens (Glover, 2004) and these friendships will often transcend beyond the gardening atmosphere (Glover, Parry & Shinew, 2005). In their exploratory study of Latino community gardens in New York City, Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny (2004) found that gardeners and garden members more often view their community gardens as social and cultural spaces than agricultural production sites. These findings are consistent with Wakefield et. al.'s (2007) research, in which participants described their community gardens not only as a location for fresh food production, but also as a setting that facilitated positive social interaction and community building.

Significantly, research has also shown that relationships that grow within the setting of a garden are often relied upon for more than just assistance in garden-specific activities (Teig et al., 2009). Friendships made within the gardens often blossom into informal agreements and mutual reciprocity between individuals, to help one another outside of the garden sites (Teig et al., 2009) – with individuals often reporting drawing upon these relations to acquire a number of resources both related and unrelated to gardening (Glover, 2004; Glover, Parry & Shinew, 2005). Building on this, Teig et. al.'s (2009) qualitative exploration of community gardeners in the US, suggest that through participation in community gardening, participants are able to gain important social supports, and describe being able to rely upon these persons in the face of illness or difficult times (Teig et al., 2009). In this sense, community gardens can become a strategy in building social capital, by granting individuals social 'credits' related to their work together within the garden that can be used to facilitate other purposive actions or supports (Glover, Parry & Shinew, 2005).

Although lacking empirical evidence, the potential for community gardens to influence broader social processes has been theorized. As Glover, Parry & Shinew (2005) state, *'the effects of the community gardens [are] not necessarily bound within the context in which they were originally generated'* (pg. 80). Based on their research findings, which signify that community gardens can lead to further neighborhood organizing by providing a physical location for residents to meet each other, socialize, learn about other organizations, activities and issues in their local community, Armstrong et al. (2000) suggests that gardening may serve as a catalyst for residents to begin to address issues collectively. Through their examination of the democratic effects of community gardens, Glover, Shinew and Parry (2005) propose that through interaction with others, participation in community gardening may facilitate social exchange and heighten critical consciousness about neighborhood issues that could potentially prompt participants to adopt and practice democratic values. Community gardens could therefore become a medium through which democratic values are practiced and reproduced and issues of collective importance to communities are addressed (Glover, Shinew and Parry, 2005). In this way, these authors contend the notion that social issues must be addressed through existing administrative and representative institutions, and instead, suggest that community gardens may represent an important public health strategy to facilitate community organization and empowerment for social change.

While building social capital is most often viewed as a positive attribute and outcome of community gardening programs, researchers equally caution careful exploration of the ways in which social capital is shared and experienced among diverse gardening members. Without careful consideration and planning, those in weak social positions within a garden can feel detached from planning processes and may feel excluded from transactions that are mediated

through the building of friendships and social capital (Glover, 2004). In this way, the social benefits related to participation in community gardening may become inequitable, such that some members of the gardens are more privileged and engaged than others (Glover, 2004). Noting the potential for this inequity, Glover, Parry & Shiner (2005) suggests that researchers critically analyze social capital and study not only its collective value, but also its potential for unequal application.

2.9.3 Gardening: Economic Benefits

Community and backyard gardens, as an alternative to the market system, have the potential to be economically beneficial for individuals and households, by augmenting the food budget, thus freeing up money, which can then be used for other necessary expenditures (Fairholm, 1999). With very little peer-reviewed research specifically examining the economic return of participation in food gardening, evidence relative to the cost-benefit of gardening participation remains ambiguous. In some cases, gardeners perceive the substitution of garden-grown produce for store-bought foods as making a significant difference in their household food costs. As one participant of Wakefield et. al.'s (2007) qualitative study of community gardens described, participation in gardening meant that during the harvest season they no longer had to shop at "No Frills" shops (store which employ techniques to keep prices low) for food. In contention to this, other research, such as that conducted by Kortright and Wakefield in 2009, presents a portrait of food gardeners who typically do not grow food out of financial necessity, and instead are motivated to grow food for cooking, teaching, environmental, hobby, and aesthetic reasons. It should be noted, however, that in comparison to Wakefield et. al.'s (2007) study, where community gardens were located in high poverty areas of the city of Toronto, only one participant of Kortright and Wakefield (2009) research stated that their household sometimes

did not have enough to eat; all others reported always having enough of the kinds of food they wanted. As such, these studies portray the outcomes of gardening from two distinctly different perspectives. This begs the question as to how motivators for growing food or the benefits perceived from participation in such programs are relative to individuals experiences with food deprivation or household resource constraint.

Earlier research also provides some insight into the potential economic savings of gardens to participants through approximation of a predicted dollar value relative to food production. In one such study, Patel (1991), using a USDA developed formula, converted the gardening area of 905 community gardens in Newark, New Jersey, into a dollar value in order to average a monetary output of production of these sites. Applying this formula to an average size garden plot in this area (reported to be approx. 720 square feet) and assuming good crop quality and frost-free days less than 200, Patel (1991) estimated the dollar value of production per garden to be \$475 per season (after accounting for \$25 of input costs). The percentage return of this involvement, as Patel (1991) denotes, is particularly advantageous since these savings are also tax-free. Using early harvest yields and the 1987-1988 dollar market value of vegetables and fruits, Blair, Giesecke and Sherman completed a similar investigation into the potential economic benefits of gardening participation in 1995. Although unknown as to the average size of the garden plot used to base their estimate, these authors suggest a more modest estimate than that of Patel (1991), with the average economic gain of these gardens approximated at \$113 per year; accounting for an average of \$47 per person spent on plants, inputs and fencing.

2.10 Participatory Approaches: Advocacy and Policy Change

As O'Connor (2009) suggests, the idea that scientific knowledge is the key to solving social problems has been a longstanding pillar of positivist ideology. Nowhere is this more

apparent than in North America's current climate of poverty problems, where "*poverty remains a fact of life for millions...and remains stubbornly resistant to all that social scientists have learned about its 'causes, consequences and cures'*" (O'Connor, 2009, pg. 3). Forefront in her argument is that poverty knowledge, as currently constituted, needs to change – from that which focuses on how social problems affect the poor, to that which looks to knowledge that is systemic, action-based, and informed by the everyday lived experience of the poor. Very little is known, however, of the role community-based programs play in engaging at-risk populations and raising awareness of their lived experiences with food insecurity, particularly, how this related to creating momentum and conditions within communities for change. There is also very little understanding of successful ways that community-based agencies can work with low-income participants in order to facilitate this process. There is research, however, that suggests that within a policy framework, participatory approaches to research and program development may be beneficial (Williams, 2014). In the following section, a brief overview of participatory approaches to research and intervention strategies, including examples of how such collaborative efforts have been effective in increasing political advocacy and advancing political action will be provided.

Over the past several decades, Participatory Action Research (PAR) has become an increasingly utilized research and intervention strategy in the realm of public health. Though varied in their respective goals and traditions, PAR is often used synonymously (and in some cases, inclusively) for other terms, such as, "community-based participatory research", "mutual inquiry" and "participatory research" (Minkler, 2000) - given the shared core principles and values of these evolved approaches, in which the researcher assumes the role of co-learner and the emphasis placed on community participation and the translation of research findings into

social transformation and action (Minkler, 2000). What is distinct about PAR and other community-centered approaches are not the specific methods employed, but rather, the equitably involvement of the directly affected by (or with a direct ‘stake’ in) the issue being studied in all phases of the research process. As such, Minkler (2000) suggests that academic researchers and community partners share a *commitment to consciously blurring the lines between the researcher and the researched* (pg. 192).

Participatory approaches are further differentiated from more “traditional” forms of research and practice in terms of the participation and influence of diverse (and more specifically non-academic) partners in the process of creating knowledge (Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker, 1998). This means researchers acknowledge, respect, value and privilege local knowledge; voices, which are often subjugated and marginal in the deliberations of mainstream policy and program planning (Horowitz, Robinson & Seifer, 2009). By working together on issues of identified importance to the community, it has been suggested that results will be relevant and directly applicable to the problems at hand in order to change and improve them (Wadsworth, 1998). The successes of participatory approaches in addressing community health inequities and mobilizing communities around public policy change have been well documented in the United States (US). Researchers from the US have shown participatory approaches to be effective in research and community-based health interventions that have led to healthy public policy change relative to chronic disease management, including diabetes (Vásquez et al., 2007) and cancer (Peterson, Minkler, Vásquez & Baden, 2006) as well as issues of environmental justice (Tajik & Minkler, 2006) and health (Minkler, Brekwich, Vásquez & Shepard, 2006).

Importantly, within the context of this thesis research, participatory approaches have also been shown to be beneficial in addressing issues of income related barriers to food access that

are inextricably to the experience of food insecurity in Canada (Knezevic, Hunter, Watt, Williams & Anderson, 2014; Williams, 2014). Since 2002, researchers from Nova Scotia have conducted Provincial Participatory Food Costing research, assessing the cost of a basic nutritious diet for families and individuals of various age and gender groups and applying these findings comparatively to basic living expenses, current wages and income supports in order to assess the affordability of a nutritious diet throughout the province (Williams et al., 2012b; Newell, Williams & Watt, 2014). Although food costing has been conducted throughout the country for decades, the process in Nova Scotia is unique in that it is the only province to use a participatory food costing model (Williams et al., 2012c). This means that those experiencing food insecurity play a central role in this research; including decision-making, data collection, analysis, communication and dissemination of research findings. This participatory food costing project is one of many initiatives that have helped to build relationships among individuals and organizations who are committed to addressing issues of food insecurity in Nova Scotia. It has brought together those with first-hand experience with food insecurity with those who have the ability to influence policy change; enhancing our understanding of the issue, and bringing together individuals with varied perspective in order to put forth community-based solutions to address it. Since inception, the Participatory Food Costing Projects have played a key role in influencing positive changes relative to building food security in Nova Scotia (Knezevic, Hunter, Watt, Williams & Anderson, 2014; Johnson, Williams & Gillis, in press; Williams, 2014). Food security has been identified as one of four priority areas in the Healthy Eating Nova Scotia (Government of Nova Scotia, 2005), and food costing research has been the basis for modest increases to minimum wage and Income Assistance rates (Williams et al., 2012b; Williams et al., 2012c). Moreover, these projects have been significant in giving women experiencing food

insecurity in this province a voice – by providing them with the opportunities to tell their stories, and engaging them in efforts to address food insecurity, through action-based research (Williams et al., 2012a; Williams et al., 2012b).

Overall, participatory approaches to health promotion have shown potential for effectively addressing public policy change by engaging multiple stakeholders – including those directly affected by an issue and those who have potential to influence policy implementation and development. In the same way, there is potential for participatory approaches to be beneficial in terms of aligning community-based food programs or community development initiatives with more political efforts for social policy change. While clearly more research is needed to better understand the role and integration of participatory approaches within program development, in her aforementioned study of the “Cooking for Families” programs in Vancouver, Milligan (2010) indicated that on a continuum of personal and community empowerment (Laverack, 2004 as cited in Milligan, 2010) – in which personal action and small, mutual, community-based groups or partnerships lead into social and political action – community-based food programs (such as the Cooking Fun for Families community kitchen program) “*hold the potential for developing community action*” (pg. 226).

2.11 Community Action Program for Children/Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program: A Brief Introduction

The Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) is a federal initiative of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) that provides long-term funding to community groups and coalitions across Canada to support the development of programs that promote health and social development among child (0-6yrs) and families facing at-risk conditions (PHAC, 2010a). Similarly, the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) is another of PHAC’s child-focused

initiatives, providing long-term funding to community groups to develop or enhance programs for vulnerable pregnant women, aiming to improve the health of mothers and their infants, reduce the incidence of unhealthy birth weights and promote/support breastfeeding (PHAC, 2010b). Both CAPC and CPNP were initiated because of federal commitment from Canada *to invest in the well-being of vulnerable children* in response to international discussions during the United Nations World Summit for Children in the early 1990's (PHAC, 2010a; PHAC, 2010b).

More than two decades later, reports from the PHAC suggest that CAPC/CPNP collectively fund more than 750 projects nationwide; 22 of which are located in the province of Nova Scotia (PHAC, 2010c; PHAC, 2010d). The diversity of CAPC/CPNP projects are far reaching, with programs ranging from drop-in childcare, to outreach and home visiting, nutritional support and collective kitchens, cultural programs and celebrations and literacy development etc. (PHAC, 2010d). As suggested by Williams, Langille & Stokvis (2005) in their evaluative report of CAPC/CPNP programs in Canada – informed by deliberative dialogues with CAPC/CPNP representatives and a review of relevant evaluation and knowledge translation-based literature, it is this diversity that is key to the success of CAPC/CPNP projects (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005). By acknowledging that communities are well positioned to recognize the needs of children and their families, CAPC/CPNP offers flexibility in the use of funds; such that individual projects can shape their programs in response to the needs and wants of their community (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005) and can better adapt alongside the communities changing dynamics. As one representative of Williams, Langille & Stokvis (2005) discussions reported, *“It’s great that CAPC/CPNP have let the projects be so diverse so long as they are reaching the (target population), recognizing that communities change and develop...”* (pg. 2). The adaptable nature of project funding has undoubtedly contributed to CAPC/CPNP positive

evaluations, which suggests that these programs continue to be relevant for Canadians, reaching vulnerable children and their families living in conditions of risk and contributing to their health and social development (PHAC, 2010c; PHAC, 2010d).

Central to this thesis project, the Kids Action Program (KAP) is one of many networks of outreach programs in Nova Scotia funded through CAPC and CPNP. Located in the Annapolis Valley Region, the KAP offers primary prevention services, family programming and countless resources and supports to families with young children in the Hants, Kings and Annapolis Counties of Nova Scotia (PHAC, 2010e). Participating families of KAP face multiple barriers and most often include children of adolescent mothers, families with low incomes, and those who are socially or geographically isolated (PHAC, 2010e). Increased awareness of the inability of low-income families and individuals to meet their dietary needs has promoted the development of KAP programming that addresses the unmet food needs of their clients. This includes, but is not limited to, a subsidized Food Box Program, a community outreach garden and backyard garden plots. Although the successes and drawbacks of these individual programs are evident through previous project evaluations, more research (such as that completed in this thesis) is needed to explore the contributions of their programs, and their collective work in efforts to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia.

2.12 Summary

The literature review began with a discussion of the emergence of food insecurity, its determinants and the implications of this experience on health and well-being. Poverty was identified as one of the key determinants of household food insecurity in Canada; the gendered experience of both poverty and food insecurity for women was highlighted and supports the specific lens of this case-study. A critical examination of current responses to food insecurity

helps to paint a picture of the current landscape, and illustrates gaps in our understanding of how to address this issue. Finally, because the current research lacks comprehensive and ecological evaluations of community-based programs, including their benefits to individual and community health, gardens were used as an example of the potential role of community-based programs in addressing issues of household food insecurity. **Chapter 3** will move beyond the current research and literature, and seek to describe the theoretical framework and methods used to structure this study.

CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Paradigm

3.1.1 Critical Theory

This study was framed and carried out using a *critical theoretical perspective*, an approach in social science, which attempts to understand, confront, and change the process by which a grossly inequitable society (or sphere within society) uses historically constructed ideology to convince people that oppression (in its many guises) is normal, necessary or inevitable (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Brookfield, 2005). As Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) suggest, such dominant ideologies are not simply imaginative or deceptive relations that individuals and groups live out; they are very much inscribed and sustained in social and institutional practice. Thus, critical theory is concerned with the ways in which the economy; matters of race, class and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct systems in which differences in power and injustice exist (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994).

Research within the critical realm assumes that knowledge is value-mediated, and therefore, is dependent on the interpretation of a particular interaction between the research and the researched (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Methodologically, the contentions of critical theory are evidenced in the intentional focus of this thesis on increasing critical consciousness (understanding how power is embedded in how society is organized and striving for change) (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and illuminating the experiences and values shared by women participants as central in understanding the contributions of community-based programs to food security. Critical theory has guided not only who speaks and who listens in this thesis research, but also whose voices are deemed *most* valid (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002).

Indeed, the assumptions of this paradigm have influenced the ways that I have approached all stages of the research process; particularly the collection and interpretation of data. Assuming a critical perspective has enabled a rich understanding of the food-security related work of the KAP, particularly how, through their work, they are challenging an environment that supports inequity and income inequality; such as that experienced by the participants of their programs. By approaching this research through a lens that highlights power relations and dominant values and ideologies, this study seeks a transformative purpose, situating these data within the broader goal of achieving improved food security for all Nova Scotians.

3.1.2 Researcher Paradigm

Due to the value-mediated nature of research within the critical tradition, such that the investigator and participant are interactively linked – with the values of the researcher inevitably influencing the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) suggest that researchers must “*enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so that no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site*” (pg.140). As such, it has been important to state and remain cognizant of the influence (and value) of my own subjectivity, including my previous involvement and associations with the KAP, as well as my beliefs and perspectives relative to building food security throughout this research process.

My involvement with the KAP began in 2010, when I was hired on as a research assistant with Sub-Node Three (SN3)⁶ of the Atlantic Social Economy and Sustainability (SES) Research Network, a project in which my co-supervisor (Dr. Patricia Williams) and thesis committee

⁶ One of six research clusters of the SES, with a research focus on Mobilization: Food Security and Community Economic Development.

member (Debra Reimer) were also involved. In this position, I became familiarized with the varied efforts of the KAP in providing supportive services for at-risk women, children and families in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia. As one of my major tasks as a research assistant, I was involved in the evaluation of KAP's three gardening projects (a vegetable garden at a children's center, a community outreach garden and individual raised-bed backyard gardening plots). I completed four focus groups (two with women participants of the garden and two with their children), with the goal of exploring and understanding the benefits, barriers and opportunities of participation in these programs from the perspectives of participants. It was through my interactions in these focus groups; and hearing the true connections that participants had to the gardens, to the KAP, and even more so, to each other, that led me to want to learn more about the experiences of participants involved in community-based programs, how this relates to the food security related work of the KAP and the contributions of these efforts to household food security.

My affiliation with the KAP has undoubtedly acted as an asset throughout this research process. It has enabled me to quickly build rapport with KAP staff members and has provided me with a foundational understanding of KAP as an organization; I therefore entered this research with preliminary insight into the benefits of KAP and their programming to women and their families. Equally, I have remained acutely aware of the fact that, because of my prior connections to the KAP as well as my background and interests, I bring with me to this research some preconceptions, of which I have outlined here. My positive experiences with participants and staff members involved in the KAP gardening projects, as well as my knowledge of the committed efforts of KAP's executive director, has shaped my feelings about KAP; that it contributes positively to building household food security for women and their families. In

addition to this, my own attitudes and beliefs related to food security, including my partiality towards strategies that engage and empower marginalized groups, help to build community capacity, and support local, sustainable food systems, have undoubtedly molded the ways in which I view and hierarchically situate programs aimed at addressing food insecurity. I acknowledge that my own subjectivity has influenced the direction of this research project and is inherent in how this project has been positioned, structured and carried out. Thus, remaining critically aware of my paradigm as a researcher through personal reflection and regularly meeting and discussion with my supervisors has been essential in enabling me to remain personally reflexive throughout all stages of this project.

3.2 Theoretical Framework(s)

3.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

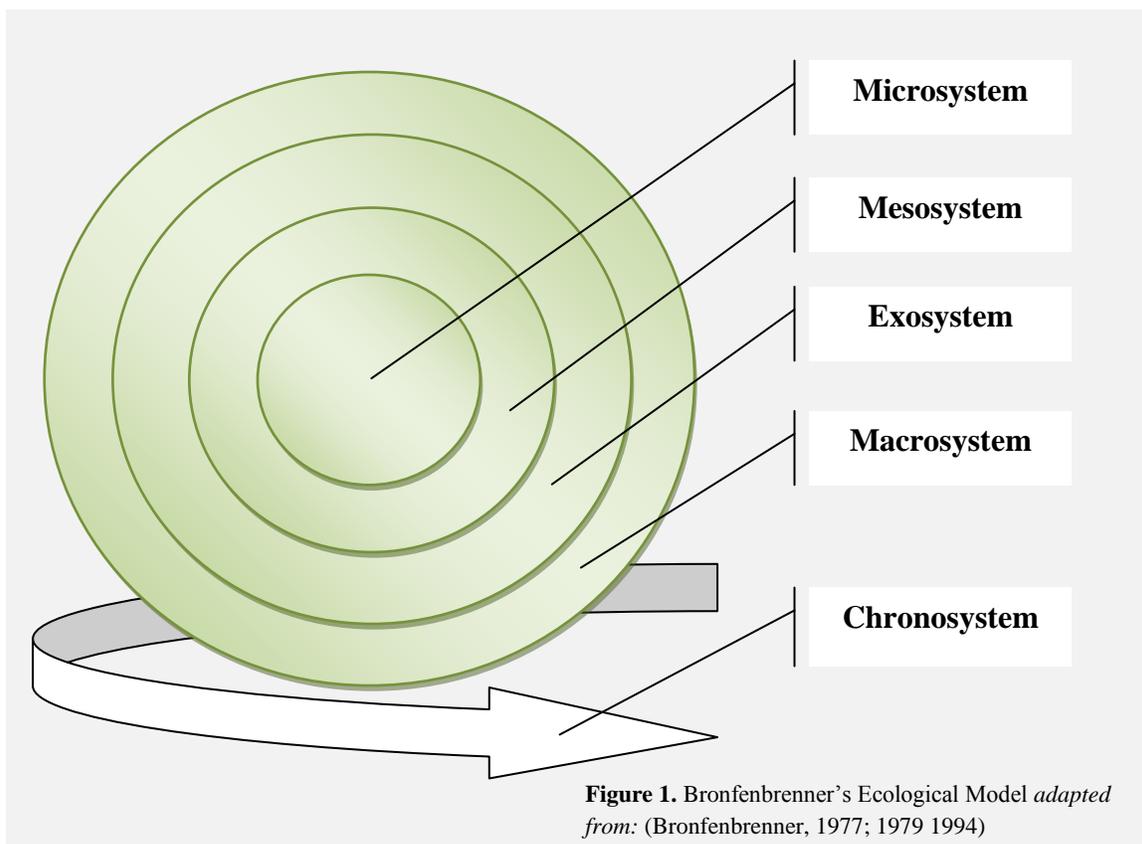
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is a theoretical perspective of human development that focuses on the changing relations between individuals and the environments in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). As Bronfenbrenner suggests, understanding human development demands going beyond the direct observation of the behaviors of one or two persons in the same place. It requires examining multi-person systems of interaction, not exclusive to a single setting and must take into consideration the diverse environments outside the immediate settings that contain the person or persons of interest (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Although initially instituted within the realm of developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory Model has been applied in this thesis project in harmonization with a critical theoretical paradigm, as a framework to help direct data collection and analysis. Bronfenbrenner's model meshes well with the principles of critical theory in that the layers of the ecological framework allowed for multi-level explication of the experience of

food insecurity for KAP participants as well as the contributions of KAP programs and staff members in addressing these situations. This ranged from the inequalities that impeded participant's immediate access to food, to the broader injustices that underlie these issues and systematically impel and keep these women in the oppressive state that is food insecurity. As depicted in **Figure 1**, these levels have been categorized according to what Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1979; 1994) has discerned to be five interlocking layers of the environment: the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem* and *chronosystem*.

The *microsystem* is the innermost layer of the ecological system, and includes structures and relations contained within one's immediate environment (for example, the impacts of women's participation in KAP programming on their immediate acquisition of food and resources). The next layer, the *mesosystem* is comprised of the interconnections between and among structures in one's immediate environment (for example, KAP's engagement in education and awareness). External to the *mesosystem*, the *exosystem* includes linkages and processes that indirectly affect the structures in women's immediate environments (for example, KAP's network of partnerships and collaboration for the purpose of advocacy and policy outcomes). The outermost layer, or the *macrosystem*, is often referred to as the blueprint in which all preceding systems exist and manifest. Unlike the other systems, the macrosystem does not refer to specific contexts that affect the life of a particular person; instead, it represents the general culture or subculture, which, formally or informally, set the pattern for structures that occur at the concrete level (for example, stigmatization relative to the experiences of poverty and food insecurity). Lastly, the *chronosystem* is the final parameter that extends the environmental systems to encompass changes or consistencies of a person or their environments over time (for example, the commitment and engagement of the KAP in building food security long-term)

(Bronfenbrenner 1977; 1979; 1994). Overall, as a framework, the ecological model has provided a means of delineating the levels of the experience of food insecurity for women and their families, as well as the ways in which the KAP is engaged in these efforts - thus embedding women's experiences in food security related programming within a contextual system, exemplifying the work of the program-specific and organizational contributions that KAP (and KAP staff) bring to each of these levels.



3.2.2 Household Food Security

To conceptualize the contributions of the KAP, all research questions have been examined through the lens of individual and household food security. To inform this perspective, a combined definition as proposed by Canada's Action Plan for Food Security (1998) and Anderson (1990) has been applied. For the purpose of this thesis, household food security has

been defined as a situation that occurs when *all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life* (Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, 1998) [and includes] *assured ability to acquire these foods in socially respectable ways* (Anderson, 1990). This definition has been particularly useful in informing the organization and interpretation of data – enabling the realization of the contributions of KAP's food related programs to previously (and academically) defined components that characterize the experience of food insecurity for women and their families. The application of this theoretical frame has also further contributed to the conceptualization and understanding of how KAP's food-related programs and the broader contextual systems (i.e. KAP staff, and KAP as an organization) in which these programs are embedded contribute to food insecurity. In keeping with Smith's (1983) rendering of gendered social relations, however, the proposed definitions have been used in a purely foundational way, in which our understanding of what it means to be food insecure is best defined by the everyday experiences of the women interviewed. Keeping flexibility in such frameworks is particularly important in the critical analyses of women's issues because, as Smith (1983) denotes, *such concepts have been built upon a presupposition of how the world appears within discourses from which women have for centuries been excluded* (pg. 4).

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Research Design

Using a critical lens, this study sought to examine the ways in which the KAP, through their food-security related work, contributes to household food security among low-income women and their families living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia. To do so, a qualitative, embedded, single-case study design was followed, using the KAP as the central unit

of analysis, or the “case”. A qualitative approach was selected because of the fitting nature of these types of data within the realm of critical inquiry (Creswall, 2007); lending themselves well as processes of empowerment, in which typically marginalized individuals are able to share their stories and have their voices heard. Further to this, qualitative data provides rich, naturalistic descriptions of participants’ experiences, allowing for deeper understanding of the work of the KAP both descriptively, as well as in terms of its meaning to participants (Creswell, 2007).

Yin (1994; 2009) suggests that case study methodologies are preferred in instances where the research question seeks to examine the “how” and “why” of complex social phenomena within a real-life context, and in doing so, extensive or “in-depth” descriptions of these phenomena are required. Thus, from a critical theoretical perspective, this methodology provided a vehicle for exploring and understanding, through dialogue, the experiences of women participants and KAP staff members; including their involvement in KAP’s food related programming, their understanding of the contributions of KAP, and the relatedness of these experiences to their understanding of individual and household food (in)security. Certainly, as an interwoven framework guiding the collection, organization and interpretation of the qualitative data, Bronfenbrenner’s (1977; 1979; 1994) ecological model has been useful in creating a comprehensive understanding of the “case” from the critical paradigm, such that the various individual, communal, social and political factors named by participants (including those that contribute to food insecurity in Nova Scotia) are presented and discussed.

A major benefit of the case study approach in the context of this research is that it has allowed for the investigation of contextual systems that are highly pertinent to our understanding of KAP as an organization. Specifically, through use of case study methodology, the experiences of women involved in KAP are considered alongside the contributions of KAP, thus creating a

more holistic and comprehensive understanding the work of this organization in relation to individual and household food security. Moreover, by allowing the research to retain its holistic view, and by capturing the meaningful characteristics of real-life events, findings from this case study will be highly relevant in broader applications; informing recommendations and promising practices for community-based programs, like KAP, to both engage vulnerable populations in supportive programming and address socio-economic determinants of health and well-being. In this way, the tenants of critical theory are further upheld in that the learnings stemming from this research provide a representative “case”, complementing current research of community-based programs (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarsuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b) and illustrating their potential role in effecting long-term or systems change (Brookfield, 2005). As Stake (1994) suggests, while single cases are not a strong base for generalizing to populations, “people can learn much that is *general* about single cases” (pg.85).

3.3.2 Sample Selection: Interview Participants

Due to the relative specificity of participant selection, purposeful, snowball sampling techniques were used in the selection of KAP participants and staff members for the individual interview process. All KAP staff members were invited to participate in an interview, while KAP participant interviews were restricted to women over the age of 18 who were previously, or are currently involved in KAP programming. Several processes were utilized in the recruitment of participants. Throughout the months of November-January, 2011 nearly 40 recruitment posters (**Appendix A**) were distributed to women involved with KAP through the Great Beginnings Food Box Program. In addition to this, recruitment packages (which included a poster, letter of information and informed consent form – **Appendix B**) were handed out in-person to women involved with KAP in Canning, NS; others were distributed via staff members to participants of

KAP's sister programs in Hants County, NS. Although this process did make individuals more aware of my regular presence (and purpose) in the programming, no women contacted me directly as a result of seeing the posters or receiving information regarding this study.

My lack of success in the retention of participants through the use of recruitment posters and information packages lead me to me rethink and alter my approach. Soon thereafter, I came to realize that women's participation hinged on the establishment of rapport, relationships and trust – with them and with KAP staff members. As one staff member described, talking about a program in which a public health nurse was brought in to talk with participants, *'...it's about – they trust me. Therefore, they will trust this person, and that's part of it – I don't know how it would happen otherwise...'* (KAP Staff). Based on this realization, I made the decision to revise my recruitment process (MSVU research ethics board was contacted and no change in protocol was deemed necessary), beginning my interviews with KAP staff members rather than women participants. This allowed me more time participate in KAP programs and foster relationships with participants, enabling me to better understand the circumstance that shaped their lives and develop the trust needed for participation.

In total, four (of the five) full time staff members involved with KAP's Annapolis Valley Programming in the Wolfville-Canning-Kentville area agreed to participate in this study. These individuals were extended an invitation to participate during in-person conversations, during which they were each given a recruitment package and asked to contact me at a later date to schedule a time and place to convene if they were interested in participating in an interview. An additional six women (all over the age of 18) previously or currently involved in KAP programs agreed to participate in this study. These women were given a verbal synopsis of the proposed research; they were also given a recruitment package outlining the purpose, risks and benefits of

their participation. Three of the six interviews scheduled with KAP women participants were cancelled (two on the basis of medical emergencies); efforts were made to reschedule these interviews with no success. In the end, three women involved in KAP programs participated in an individual interview.

3.3.3 Data Collection: Interviews

Two interview guides (**Appendix C**) were developed. Both interview guides were informed by preliminary findings from previously conducted focus groups with women involved in KAP's community outreach and backyard gardening projects. These findings were helpful in better understanding the nature of KAP programs, the experiences of KAP participants and the principles of KAP's work as an organization. They were further useful in informing a sensitive approach to interviews with KAP participants, through exemplifying language and structure/flow of questioning. The questions asked in interviews with KAP participants centered on their experiences with food insecurity and the relationship between this experience and their involvement with KAP's programs and KAP as an organization. The questions asked in interviews with KAP staff members centered on their role within KAP, the potential supports, services or opportunities they feel are provided to participants through engagement in KAP programs and the broader role of community-based agencies in addressing the issue of food insecurity in the long-term. The use of semi-structured interview guides allowed room for broader discussion of participants' experiences, while still ensuring guidance in relevant data collection.

Interview guides were validated through face validity. They were also reviewed by my thesis committee to ensure they met the goals of the project and that questions were clear and promoted open-ended responses. Interview guides were piloted in separate interviews with a

KAP staff member and participant. Both individuals were given a verbal and written description of the study prior to the interview and completed a consent form. The purpose of these pilot interviews were to ensure the questions were congruent with the objectives of this study and allowed me to become more comfortable as an interviewer. Given that each of these participants provided consent to participate and fit the inclusion criteria of this study, both were included in this sample as part of data collection. No further edits were made as a result of these pilot interviews; the interview guides were deemed finalized after this process. Upon participant consent, all interviews were audio taped using a digital recorder and field notes were taken throughout. Each interview was successively conducted and transcribed verbatim, such that emergent themes and personal experiences from one interview were used to inform the proceeding (i.e. informing probing questions, etc.). To increase the validity of findings, member checking occurred throughout the interview process by continually confirming participants' experiences, and reading back what was said by participants (if needed).

3.3.4 Participant Observation

In addition to the individual interviews, verbal consent was sought from the KAP executive director, KAP staff members and the women involved in specified programs to act as a participant observer. As a participant observer (Stake, 1994), I was not merely a passive spectator within KAP., rather, I sought to actively (and consistently) participate in what I deemed to be significant events and activities, particularly those that related to food and food security (Yin, 1994). This included (though is not limited to) preparing and eating snacks and meals with women participants, helping to pack food boxes with KAP staff members, supervising participant's children as part of KAP's free-onsite childcare program, and driving participants to and from programs. Detailed field notes were taken following each of my visits to KAP (which

constituted my participation in at least one program per week for the duration of nearly five months), these notes contained my personal observations of verbal and non-verbal interaction between KAP staff and community members as well as my own reflections of my time spent with participants and my participation in these programs. Participant observation was an important tool in data collection; it was also critical in establishing rapport and reciprocity with participants and staff of the KAP prior to the individual interviews.

3.3.5 Document Review

Individual interviews and participant observations were supplemented with the gathering and analyzing of specified documents. A previously developed (Llewellyn, 2010) advocacy log and partnership profile were completed using relevant KAP materials, including program reporting and evaluations. The advocacy log provides insight into the types of advocacy related activities relative to food security in which the KAP is involved. This tool documents types of advocacy activities (i.e. conducting presentations, media releases, communicating with provincial stakeholders, making contacts to mobilize support, participating in food security meetings, disseminating reports, etc.), their estimated reach, the type of stakeholders involved (i.e. health, education, government, politicians, general public, etc.) as well as any relevant outcomes that may have arisen or could arise from these initiatives. Adding to this, the partnership profile helps to inform an understanding of the relations and collaborations between the KAP and other organizations, institutions or structures also involved in food security related work in the province. The partnership profile tool documents organization identification (name, address, etc.) the type of organization (non-profit, for-profit, government, schools, other), the depth of this relationship (network, cooperator, partner, coalition member, collaborator), the outcomes that this organization contributes to (education, advocacy, public policy) and finally

the resources provided through this partnership. Both the advocacy log and partnership profile have been used to further support the qualitative data, and contribute to a building a comprehensive understanding of how KAP addresses household food security across the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1974; 1979; 1994) model .

3.3.6 Triangulation

Individual interviews, participants observation and document review have been integrated within this thesis through a process of data *triangulation*; a means of increasing qualitative validity by identifying areas of convergence and disagreement in different data sources. Participant observation - documented through field notes and personal reflection - have enabled a greater (and more grounded) understanding of the everyday interactions and activities that transpire within KAP, the experiences women participants bring to these programs and their relevance and meaning in relation to the proposed research question. From an empirical standpoint, understanding these nuances was particularly useful in the analysis of the written data and the development of the coding structure; the themes presented in this thesis represent a process of cross-checking and substantiation between what I observed through my interactions and participation in KAP programs and what I was told by participants in the interviews. Understanding the context of participant's experience has been particularly useful in the writing up of these results - where field notes and reflections have been included literally and/or theoretically to help paint a picture of the "case". Given that participant experiences tended to reside at the micro and meso- system, document review has enabled greater explication of how KAP contributes to food security at the level of the exo- and macro- system levels. A review of relevant documents was completed following the analysis of the individual interviews. This allowed for the identification of potential gaps in the data set and thus, a more strategic (and

relevant) selection of documents; serving to populate the advocacy log and partnership profile presented in the results section (**Chapter 4**) of this thesis.

Importantly, the themes presented in this thesis research are not simply a product of the triangulation of different data sources. Under the epistemology of critical theory, they also reflect a transactional and subjective process, whereby knowledge is co-created through specific interactions and relationships between the “researcher” and the “researched” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In this way, these results are a presentation of “what can be known” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), and represent the inextricable link between my own knowledge/values (that which I bring to the research and have gained through involvement as a participant observer) and the knowledge and experiences of KAP participants and staff members. This interaction is has been astutely named by Dwyer and Buckle (2009) as the “space between” – where the intimacy of qualitative research and my interactions with KAP staff and participants disallows me to remain a true “outsider” to these experiences, while, at the same time, my role as a researcher does not qualify me to become a complete “insider” in terms of what it means to be part of KAP programs. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative inquiry embraces this “space between”, acknowledging that, as the researcher I am not only part of the research process, but essential to it. It also, however, highlights the importance of self-reflection throughout the research process (i.e., my own personal reflections and field notes following my visits to KAP) – because, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) further denote, just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, does the analysis affect our personhood – in other words, there is no neutrality in qualitative research just greater or less self-awareness of your own subjectivity.

3.3.7 Analysis of Interview Data and Document Review

Following data collection and transcription, qualitative data from the individual interviews were imported into the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA 9 (QSR International, 2010). This software enabled the organization and management of the qualitative data, including the development and assignment of coding structures. To derive new meanings relative to the “case”, Stake (1995) suggests *direct interpretation of the individual instances, until something can be said about them as a class* (pg. 74). Thus, data was interpreted both according to its respective relevance within the immediate context described, as well as in relation to other data sources (i.e., participant observations) and the environments outlined in Bronfenbrenner’s (1974; 1979; 1994) model. Once imported into the software, data sets were created to separate data by participant group (KAP Staff vs. KAP participants). Grounded theory and constant comparison methods were used to guide data analysis. Codes were developed by comparing and contrasting emerging ideas, such that interpretive meanings could be derived from an initially highly descriptive structure. In many cases, code names were developed using the words and experiences participants - this has allowed for recognition of participant voice to transcend throughout the analysis. My thesis co-supervisors reviewed the initial coding scheme and analysis participant interviews as a method of peer review. The final thematic organization of codes was then organized using Bronfenbrenner’s (1974; 1979; 1994) framework, to allow for explication of the different levels of both participant experience and KAP’s work.

Data derived from interviews with women involved in the KAP have been critical in focusing and linking the broader work of the KAP back to the everyday experiences and realities of women and their families. This meant continually striving to create linkages between KAP’s work as an organization and the “ruling relations” (Smith, 1999) that underlie the issue of food

insecurity for women and their families. Given the critical frame of this study, it was essential to recognize the strong critique of community-based programs as a response to household food security that has been established in the current literature (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003(b)). As the guiding theoretical frame, the questions of power, capacity, participation, and equity that are central to critical theory have been fully integrated in the collection and analysis of the data. The relevance and relatedness of these findings to the current literature have been presented more explicitly in the discussion section (**Chapter 5**), providing greater insight into areas of intersection and identifying current gaps where further research is needed. Overall, these data aim to provide a holistic picture of KAP and the programs the implement; placing the experiences and voice of women who use these programs as central in these investigations and using these experiences as a starting point in building a broader understanding of the work of KAP in relation to household food security.

3.3.8 Ethical Considerations

I took a number of steps to ensure this research was consistent with the ethical standards outlined for MSVU. Following the acceptance of my thesis proposal by my committee in 2011, an application for ethics was submitted to the UREB; this application was approved in September 2011 (**Appendix D**). Informed consent was obtained prior to the individual interviews with KAP participants and staff members, outlining their rights, including the right to decline any question or leave the interview or study at any time without penalty. Given the close relations of staff and participants of KAP, particular care was taken to ensure that participant's understood the challenges of total anonymity; the possibility that those involved in KAP may become aware of the participation of others was recognized and addressed through the consent process. All responses, however, were only connected to individuals using a code or a

pseudonym, ensuring confidentiality. Confidentiality was further upheld through careful management of raw data; all audiotapes, field notes, consent forms and transcripts were kept locked in a secure venue at Mount Saint Vincent University and all electronic data was password protected. Access to raw and original data was limited to only those directly involved in the research study. All original data will be kept for a period of 5 years, at which time it will be destroyed accordingly.

3.3.9 Considerations

There are several things that must be considered relative to the rigor and generalizability of this thesis research. First, given that this was my first major research project; there are inherent limitations in the sound nature of the study design and analytical processes. While these limitations are muted by the fact that this project was overseen by qualified and experienced academic and community researchers, this thesis remains to reflect my first experiences with qualitative research methodologies, including the challenges that can arise in implementing these approaches. There is the possibility that my own positive nature as well as the structure of the interview questions may have had influence on the ways in which participants and staff members spoke of KAP programs. Furthermore, the power dynamics intertwined with the involvement of both KAP staff and KAP's executive director in this thesis project alongside the associated risks of anonymity in a small sample size and tight knit social group, gives rise to the potential of bias in participant responses; while the open and comfortable atmosphere within KAP may have mediated these effects, this is a potential limitation that cannot be overlooked.

The scope of this study must also be considered when using these findings to support other research. This is especially critical given that one of the research objectives is to use these findings to support recommendations for how other community-based organizations could be

more involved in addressing issues of food insecurity. While these generalizations can still be made, they must be done with a consciousness of the bound setting of case study research; in which findings are representative a particular place and time. As policies and individual characteristics change, so will the conditions that underlie the experiences of the women whom participated in this thesis and the parameters in which KAP and their programs operate.

Another important consideration of this research is that it represents a small sample size of limited diversity. All recruitment posters were all printed in English, thus excluding those whom may not be proficient in this language, as well as those facing literacy issues. This may have influenced the richness of the data in terms of garnering experiences and voice from those of varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as those who potentially at greater risk for health disparities (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). Finally, this sample characterizes the operation of a community-based program in a rural community in Nova Scotia; it cannot be assumed that the findings here represent the realities of food insecurity or the parameters of community programming that exist in an urban setting.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to address my three research objectives, and have organized these results accordingly. In each section, the interpretations of the results are presented. Very little discussion has been interjected to allow *first voice* to be accentuated, thus remaining true to the experiences of my participants. The first objective was to explore the *everyday experiences* of women involved in KAP, particularly their understanding of KAP's food security related programs, KAP, and how this all relates to household food (in)security. **Section 1** provides a thematic description of these experiences, as informed by individual interviews and participant observation within KAP programs, and interpreted through a food security lens. These results have been further organized within each of the interrelated environments described in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1994) to provide a snapshot of the multiple factors that impact the lives of these women and highlight the areas in which programs and organizations can work to effect change.

Section 2 builds upon the *everyday experience* of those involved in KAP's programs, and seeks to provide insight into the broader levels in which KAP is engaged in efforts that address household food insecurity. This section has also been organized using Bronfenbrenner's framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1994), but explores staff and participant understanding of the personal and organizational principles which underpin KAP's work with vulnerable populations, as well as their outward engagement in broader efforts to impact systems change, both from the perspective of moving towards improved food security within the communities they serve and elsewhere.

4.2 Recruitment Results

Information packages, including a letter of information and informed consent form were initially distributed to all seven KAP staff members during a meeting at Apple Tree Landing Children's Centre. Subsequently, recruitment posters were distributed to KAP participants in 40 food boxes as part of the Great Beginnings monthly Food Box Program, an additional 20 were distributed to participants directly during parenting and cooking classes. I received only one response from KAP participants in my initial recruitment process; four staff members agreed to participate in an individual interview. As I built rapport with KAP participants and staff, I began to invite individuals personally to participate in an interview. Through my second, less formal recruitment process, six KAP participants indicated interest in participating in an interview. Of the six women involved in KAP who indicated interest, only three participated in this study. Two of the women cancelled the interviews without reschedule, due to family emergencies (one whose baby had pneumonia and the other had to have an emergency hysterectomy), while the third woman continually postponed the interview and was subsequently no longer in contact.

In total, seven interviews were conducted for this study. Consistent with the recruitment criteria, KAP staff members, as well as women over the age of 18 years, who were currently or previously involved in KAP's food security related programs were included in data collection and analysis. Of the KAP participants who were interviewed, two had been involved with KAP for more than 10 years, while the third had just recently become aware and involved with the program in the past six months. All women resided in rural Nova Scotia communities in both Kings and Hants counties – one lived with her parents, one recently sold her house and moved to a rental and the other had been given her house through inheritance. All of the women interviewed were considered “*stay at home*” moms; two of the women indicated their partner's

work as their main source of income, while the other was a lone mother, and recipient of income assistance. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, all women participants have been assigned a pseudonym name – Mary, Amy and Kay.

4.3 Section 1: Participants Everyday Experiences

Section 1 will explore the *everyday experiences* of women involved with KAP and lay the foundation for understanding how KAP impacts household food security at multiple levels. The participant's experiences are organized thematically, categorized within the *Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, Macro-, and Chrono-systems* that comprise participant's everyday lives, and critically examined based on their meanings relative to the experience of income related food (in)security. This includes highlighting some of the key power relations identified by these women as existing in opposition of their efforts to be food secure, as well as explicating their day-to-day struggles in trying to access enough healthy foods for themselves and their families.

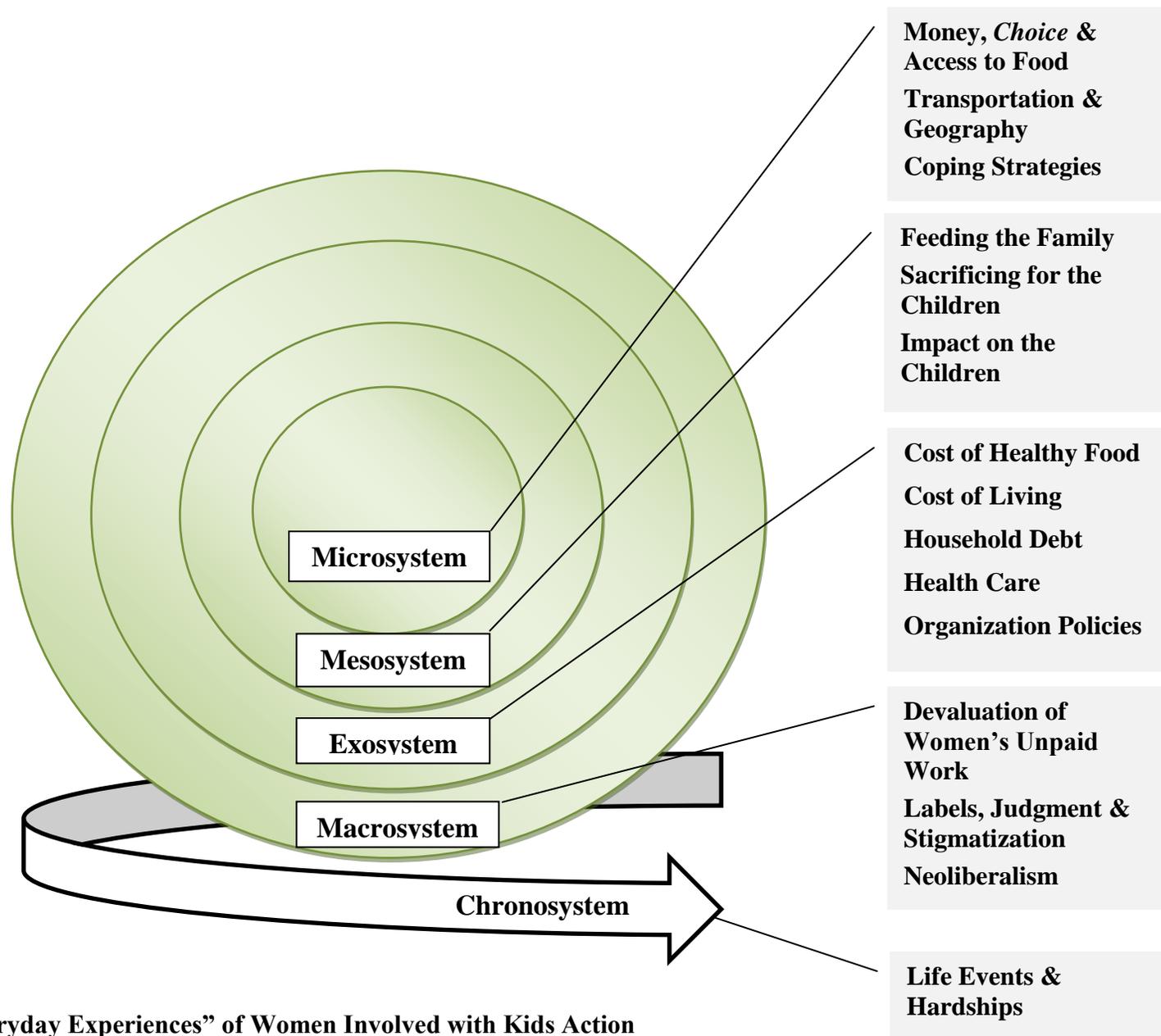


Figure 2. The “Everyday Experiences” of Women Involved with Kids Action Program as they Relate to Individual/Household Food Security

Table 1. Detailed list of the “Everyday Experiences” of Women Involved with Kids Action Program as they Relate to Individual/Household Food Security

| Microsystem |
|--|
| <p>Money, Choice and Access to Food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income as primary determinant of food access • Competing household expenditures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Essential living expenses and the impact on food budget <p>Transportation and Geography</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grocery stores tend to be centralized in more urban areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No shopping store to store for sales • Costs of transportation in a rural community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of public transportation ○ Cost of gas/cab/paying a friend or relative to drive ○ Money for transportation typically diverted from the already limited food budget <p>Coping Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monotony of the diet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cheap, simple carbohydrates as a staple (e.g., pasta) ○ Loss of personal preference in food choices • Quality vs. Quantity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Compromise nutrition for the sake of ‘more food’ • Use of charitable food assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited healthy choices ○ Social stigma and embarrassment (exacerbated by living in a small town) |
| Mesosystem |
| <p>Feeding the family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of women in meal preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“If I get sick, there goes the one making the meals”</i> • Self-blame when children’s needs are not met <p>Sacrificing for the children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers tend to go without – <i>“My kids come first”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ i.e., food and important medications <p>Impact on the children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School lunch programs exclude older children • Children develop own set of coping strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take coffee to school to help fill them up ○ Hoarding snacks from lunch programs to share with siblings |
| Exosystem |
| <p>Cost of healthy food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, eating healthy is more expensive • Comparatively (to other provinces), the cost of food in Nova Scotia is high <p>Cost of living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising cost of essential household expenditures (e.g., electricity) <p>Household debt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bills (credit card, mortgage payments, etc.), bank overdrafts and student loans <p>Organizational policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations around the use of charitable services • Income assistance and employment insurance programs |

| Macrosystem |
|---|
| <p>Neoliberalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualistic culture – promotes blame <p>Devaluation of Women’s Unpaid Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could not get back into workforce after having children <p>Labels, Judgment and Stigmatization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children labelled as trouble child • Pigeonholed based on economic status (<i>e.g.</i>, “welfare rat”) |
| Chronosystem |
| <p>Life Events and Hardships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational poverty • Falling on hard times |

4.3.1 The Microsystem

The most prominent experiences within participants *Microsystem*, or the layer that contains structures and relations within one's immediate environment, related to the coordinating power of money, its influence over "choice", and the resulting impact on their access to healthy foods. The following will describe these experiences, in particular how various competing monthly household expenditures impacted food access.

4.3.1.1 Money, "Choice" and Access to Food

Throughout my time at KAP and in all individual interviews, it was clear that participants' current financial situation and overall household income had a major impact on their ability to access enough food for themselves and their families. This was best exemplified in my discussion with Kay, who, when asked about the barriers she faced when it came to getting enough of the healthy foods she needed, simply replied, '*Money. That's it*' [Kay: 101]. The accounts from women in this study are corroborated by recent research (Newell, Williams & Watt, 2014) which suggests that minimum wage and income assistance rates (over the period studied) in Nova Scotia (Williams et al., 2012c)⁷ are inadequate to support the cost of living and a household's ability to afford a nutritious diet for many household types.

"Living on assistance, it becomes a treat if you can get a bag of oranges or something like that, especially with a new born baby..."

[Kay]

I: "So what sort of barriers do you face when trying to get enough foods?"

P: "The cost. It's just so expensive, especially when there is only one person working."

[Mary]

⁷ The Income Assistance (IA) program in Nova Scotia provides people in financial need with assistance with basic needs such as food, rent, utilities like heat and electricity, and clothing. The program may also help eligible clients with other needs such as child care, transportation, prescription drugs, emergency dental care, and eye glasses (Nova Scotia Community Services, 2013)

Clearly, the availability of expendable income was a governing force in participant's everyday lives. While Brookfield (2009) describes choice as a premise of "*freedom*", the accounts of women in this study suggest that when money is tight *choice* quickly morphs from that of a liberal sense to a series of hierarchical and *impossible* (Williams et al., 2010) decisions about household expenditures. Food was but one of many competing resources at the household level. Under such constraint, these women were left prioritizing their expenses; necessities with the most immediate impact on the family (e.g., electricity, heat and rent) took precedence in monthly allocation of resources, though always at the expense of something else. As the most elastic budget item, food tended to be purchased with whatever money was left over after the bills were paid and fixed costs were covered. In some cases, women talked of going without any food at all. As Amy states, "*it's hard, it's hard....every day you struggle and it's hard*". She and Mary tearfully described what it is like to have to make these difficult and unjust *choices*:

"When it gets down to your last ten bucks and you can either go buy a meal or you can put it on your bills so it's not disconnected...I've been there...it's just been so hard – I know what that's like, and it is very, very difficult"

[Amy]

"...we try – we have probably about \$60 to buy groceries every two weeks, because we owe bills – we are really just so much in debt..."

[Mary]

4.3.1.2 Transportation and Geography

Participant discussion regarding "rural living" illustrates the complex nature in which money asserts further control over their food security. All participants interviewed had little to no access to a vehicle and/or public transportation (depending on their community of residence). What's more, they all lived in isolated areas of their communities, where resources, including supermarkets, were less centralized. In this context, their physical access to food was inextricably and reciprocally linked to their economic security. The availability of household

income coordinated when and where these women were able to purchase food, while the cost associated with transportation was often covered by diverting money away from the already limited food budget. Kay discussed having to carefully plan her grocery shopping around days she received her income assistance cheque.

“And being rural it’s not like you can’t go ‘this week the superstore has 2 for 1 on so I can just whip down and stock up and buy 5 of them to have on stock’, you know what I mean? You’re budgeting your trips to town, okay I get paid this day and this day so you’re budgeting – I know I’m going to Truro and I need to get 2 cases of formula, 2 boxes of diapers, that’s just what it is. Going store to store is not an option; it’s really not an option – with the income coming in and the price of gas and whatever else...”
[Kay]

For Kay, getting to the closest store was a significant cost - there was no shopping store to store for sales and there was no going back later to pick something else up. In her case, even getting to the food bank was difficult. Lack of transportation in a rural community clearly posed a major barrier to food access.

“Like the food bank you can go and get produce, but again I have no transportation and a newborn and it’s not like I can always pay someone to drive me all the way down there – it’s not around the corner for me either.”
[Kay]

4.3.1.3 Coping Strategies

Money not only mediated *choices* around how much, but also the kinds of food these women were able to access. In light of previous research, which suggests that calorie dense, highly processed foods are often the least expensive option for consumers (Drewnowski et al., 2005) women in this study reported compromising their food choices in terms of nutrition and variety in an attempt cope with their limited food budget. Mary described the monotony of her family’s diet – cheap, simple carbohydrates had become their staple. It was to the point where she could barely contain her disgust as she talked about having to eat yet another pasta meal:

“I mean there are only so many things you can do with macaroni...and my kids only want to eat macaroni probably once a month and that’s it, the rest, they don’t even want to look at it, because we’ve lived off it so much, we counted on it, its macaroni and cheese, or macaroni and tomato soup, or macaroni and tuna, it’s just....ughh, bleh!”

[Mary]

Amy echoed this sentiment. It was obvious that for her and Mary, food *choices* were not based on personal preference or perceived health benefits; satisfying the immediate need of hunger and ensuring *more* food for their family were the priorities.

“...it’s unfortunate, because you know, are you going to go in and buy eight Mr. Noodles or are you going to buy one loaf of bread – what’s going to feed a family? Eight Mr. Noodles – there’s nothing in it, but at least you have eight meals...[and]...when you go out and buy the \$100 worth of food, nine times out of ten you are not buying the fruits and vegetables – because if you did buy the fruits and vegetables – that would be three-quarters of your bill and there would be no money for milk, for meat...for the little things...”

[Amy]

As the primary response to food insecurity in Canada (Tarasuk, 2003), it not surprising that a number of women, through both participant observation during my time at KAP programming and in the individual interview process, talked of having to use some type of charitable service, typically, food banks. While participants clearly recognized the important role of these programs in helping them to get *more* food in times of hardship, they often described what they received as being of a limited variety and poor quality.

“I go to the food bank a lot - what you get there is not always healthy. I take what I can to make healthy foods.”

[Mary]

In addition to what they were able (or unable) to garner from the food bank, there was a clear social stigma attached to the use of such programs. This was evident in both my interviews and in informal conversations with KAP participants’ who expressed feelings of humiliation and embarrassment with having to turn to these programs. For Kay, this was further amplified by the

fact that she lived in a small community, where people talk and are well aware of each other's situations.

“It’s just a little embarrassing sometimes you know...because it is such a small community, so if you go to the food bank, the next thing you know everybody and their grandmother knows and they’re talking about it...you know ‘that poor girl, her husband’s in jail...blah, blah, blah’ – like, I know right? It’s pretty plain to see...I mean at this point in my life I’m really not concerned with what other people think, other than the people that are important to me...but there is that piece that people around here know what you are doing before you have done it...”

[Kay]

Overall, in exploring their experiences at the *Microsystem* level, it is evident that secure economic access to enough nutritious, personally acceptable foods - a central premise to food security - was not satisfied for this group of women. Compromise seemed to be an inevitable and recurrent theme in their day-to-day lives. Most concerning was the fact that these decisions often revolved around their basic needs, including their own, and their family's nutrition.

4.3.2 The Mesosystem

Families, particularly children, were forefront in conversations regarding the *everyday experiences* of participants at the *Mesosystem* level. These women were very aware of the impact of their financial and food constraints on their children; it was clear that this had a significant effect on their own feelings of adequacy as a mother and caregiver. It was further evident that in their attempt to protect their children from these experiences, their own nutrition was further compromised. The following presents important themes at the *Mesosystem* of the ecological model, including the impact they feel their current situations have on their children and family and in turn, how this further contributes to, and exacerbates, their own food insecurity.

4.3.2.1 Feeding the Family

In the context of their family, many of the women in this study clearly took on the majority of responsibility for what Devault (1999) describes as the ‘caring work’, including not only rearing children and keeping up with daily household activities but also ensuring “*supper was on the table [and] everyone was fed*” [Mary].

“And then you got your allergies on top of that –XXX [my daughter] and I cannot have nuts, peanut butter or any seeds because it makes us sick. I have to watch that, because when I get sick – there goes the one making the meal, he [my husband] doesn’t cook – thank god.”

[Mary]

As observed, for most KAP participants, feeding the family was perceived as part of their job – essential to being a “*good*” wife, mother, and caregiver. However, as Devault (1999) purports, the asymmetrical division in “*caring work*” can also lead to a situation where the person, rather than the system, bears the burden of responsibility in terms of the availability of healthy meals. This was demonstrated in the individual interviews, where barriers that impede participants access to food were discussed in the context of “*we*” (themselves and their partner), while experiences in trying to provide their family and children with enough healthy food were described in the context of “*I*”. The tendency to self-blame when participants were unable to care for their family and ensure that they had the things that they *needed*, including food, was apparent for both Mary and Amy:

“My kids will even go deaf or blind because I don’t have the money to help them [starts to cry] and that bothers me. I didn’t bring my kids into the world to be suffering– my kids will either go blind or deaf because I can’t afford the batteries [referring to her daughter’s hearing aid and need for glasses], I can’t afford glasses for them, so where am I?...And it breaks my heart that I can’t afford dinner for my kids.”

[Mary]

“I know I felt very alone when XXX [referring to her son] became that way [referring to having Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder] and I felt it was my fault. Even now that he is in school and having trouble in school I still feel like it’s my fault. I know it’s just the way he is – but I’m his mom. So it’s still my fault! Cause they reflect you, they learn and grow from you – so in some ways I feel as if that’s my responsibility cause I

was the one that raised him.”
[Amy]

4.3.2.2 *Sacrificing for the Kids*

In order to ensure their children were cared for, all participants in this study spoke of going without. In her interview, Mary talked of forgoing her birth control and blood pressure medication, sacrificing her health in an attempt to free up more money to put towards the things her children needed:

“Me – I go without, I do, I go without my blood pressure pills, or my birth control pills, stuff like that – I need them, but I can’t afford them. My kids come first.”
[Mary]

4.3.2.3 *Impact on the Children*

Despite their best efforts, women participant of KAP were not always able shield their children from the negative impacts of individual/household food insecurity. Mary talked about having to send her children to school without anything to eat on several occasions. It was evident that knowing her kids were going without food during the day was incredibly hard for Mary - she broke down to tears while talking about this experience. Equally distressing was the fact that at such a young age, both Mary’s children illustrated their own set of coping strategies to try to manage their food situations and ward off hunger. As one example of this, Mary’s youngest child, who was still eligible for the school breakfast and lunch programs, would often hoard and save snacks from these meals to eat later or to give to her older sister throughout the day (who was ineligible based on her age).

P: “My girls don’t take anything to school now because I can’t afford it. I try to get them to take an apple – but that’s not going to happen. They go to room 130 out to XXX [referring to name of school], but that’s not offered to XXX [referring to her eldest daughter] cause she’s in grade 10 – she is the one they [referring to the school food program administrators] should be worried about. When they come home they’ll find anything they can cook...”

I: *“What’s room 130?”*

P: *“Room 130 out to XXX [referring to name of school] is a breakfast room, and they make sandwiches, apples - whatever they have that day that they will bring in for everybody. It’s not offered to grades 10, 11, 12 – because they think where, okay your old enough – you don’t have to eat. [My younger daughter] will even take an apple or carton of milk to [my older daughter]... [and]... I’ll buy big boxes of bars [chocolate] and juice – just to say here take this to school – or pudding – just something to keep them going that day. I just don’t think it’s fair that the breakfast club is not offered to the older ones too – because they have to eat too. [My older daughter] will take coffee from house just so she can, you know, survive for the day...”*

[Mary]

4.3.3 The Exosystem

The comparative price of healthy food, the cost of living, household debt, lack of health care coverage and restrictive organizational policies were all structures that asserted control over women’s *Micro-* and *Mesosystem* level experiences and negatively impacted their ability access enough nutritious food. Each of these factors, as identified KAP participants, will be discussed below in terms of how they relate to their experience of food insecurity.

4.3.3.1 Costs of Healthy Food

Regardless of their knowledge and understanding of food and nutrition, all KAP participants I spoke with voiced concern regarding their observation that overall, and comparatively (to other provinces and other types of food), eating well in Nova Scotia was expensive. For this group of women, it was a constant struggle on a low-income to purchase the quality foods they knew were important to their health, particularly fresh produce and whole grains. Their frustration with the price of healthy foods and its impact on their own and their family’s diet was evident throughout the individual interviews:

“It’s hard. Even with an income it’s difficult, because like I said everything that’s healthy is always more expensive”... if anything should be on sale – that [healthy foods] should be on sale, because that’s what people need. And it shouldn’t be like that there shouldn’t be any difference between white pasta and smart pasta. There should just be

smart pasta, and it's unfortunate because it's the white pasta that's 1.79, but it's the smart pasta that's better for you, but its 3.29 – versus 1.79 for the bigger bag. What are you going to pay for?"

[Amy]

"I can't afford the vegetables anymore – now that I'm on my own and I don't know what to buy. I can buy carrots and onions and if peas are on sale, mostly I'll buy them in the can – because I can't afford that healthy stuff – I really can't afford it" ..."

[Mary]

"Coming from another province – you're paying \$9 for a jug of milk – that's ridiculous- \$3 for a loaf of bread; the food here is really expensive. Comparably to Ontario – I find the food here to be very expensive, so that doesn't help either."

[Kay]

4.3.3.2 Cost of Living

It has been previously demonstrated, for at least some low-income households, monthly expenditures and essential services (e.g., rent, electricity, telephone) can give rise to, and precipitate, acute food shortages (Tarasuk et al., 2011). While no one in the interviews spoke explicitly of the rising cost of living in Nova Scotia, and its specific impact on their food situation, the demeanor of conversations around money suggest that increases in these expenses were a major cause of stress for these women in terms of their overall economic security. As Mary put it, *'it's just one thing after another'*.

And on top of everything else the cost of living has gone up, your cost of food has gone up dramatically – for this little house our power bill can be up to 200 dollars every month. It was 100 when I moved in every 2 months! And I have been here 8 years.

[Amy]

I owe them a bill in Halifax, I'm trying to get the money to pay them – it's just another bill comes up that you can't pay them and you're worrying...

[Mary]

4.3.3.3 Household Debt

Household debt was commonplace in women's conversations of their income security and ability to access nutritious food. While the types of debt varied (i.e. student loans, home ownership and credit card use), the impact of this debt on participants and their families was

universal; making their required payments meant less money available for other expenses. Mary described how money was automatically debited from each of her husband's paycheques, leaving them with almost nothing to purchase groceries or cover their other basic needs:

My husband works a beautiful job, we get a cheque, that cheque is gone before it even hits us, the bank takes probably about \$450 a month cause we have an overdraft – that leaves us probably \$200 to pay another bill – try to put groceries in between that.

[Mary]

Amy felt that the priorities within government were incredibly skewed. She felt that the cost of education kept many low-income individuals from even attending university or college, while those who were able to get loans were then left to deal with long-term payments. In her case, she was still paying off her student loans from 7 years ago:

“It seems like our NDP’s, our MLA’s are getting paid more and our school systems are going down – but then they want to know why people aren’t graduating, people aren’t going to school and then they sky-rocket student loans – like I’m still paying for my student loan and I graduated in ’05! C’mon now!”

[Amy]

Amy was not the only one who felt that the Nova Scotia government could and should be doing more to protect low-income families from these kinds of financial burdens. Mary voiced her anger towards the government, whom she felt did not care about the hardships faced by low-income families in this province. She even contemplated leaving Nova Scotia in hopes that her family may be able to find a better life elsewhere.

“I didn’t bring my kids into the world to be suffering and that’s what the government is doing – and they don’t care...The government promised to solve poverty – it’s getting worse – it’s getting so bad that my husband wants to move somewhere else – like Ontario or somewhere else – I don’t want to leave my family, but it’s come to the point where we have to – like how can you try to feed your own children in Nova Scotia – you can’t!”

[Mary]

4.3.3.4 Health Care

Mary was the only participant to bring up the burden of medical costs in terms of her overall household income and food security. With a special needs child, who required additional medical attention, the cost accumulated for health care were likely much greater than other families in similar low income situations. With her going back to school, and her husband only working part-time, they had no health insurance or other related income supports; Mary was forced to pay the full price for medications, doctor visits and other necessary items for herself and her children. Her youngest daughter needed glasses, and her oldest, a special needs child, had a hearing aid that regularly required new batteries. In her current situation, however, she could afford neither.

“I think there should be a way that I can get my prescriptions, like XXX [referring to her youngest daughter] needs glasses and I can’t afford them – I can’t afford the \$58 dollars that she needs for her eyes to be tested – because she’s over the age of 12 – I can’t afford that - I had to go to school Tuesday and XXX’s [referring to her eldest daughter] worker says ‘she never has batteries’ and I’m like ‘it’s because it’s so tight, I can’t afford the batteries’ – and it’s the truth. I am - that’s how tight we are.”

[Mary]

It should be noted that although Mary was the only to speak personally of this issue in her interview, my experience with KAP suggests that health crises seemed to be a frequent occurrence among this population group. As an example, while recruiting for data collection, one of my interviews was cancelled and additional two rescheduled because of unforeseen medical emergencies within potential participants’ families.

4.3.3.5 Organizational Policies

Organizational policies impacted when and how often women were able to access extra food supports and other resources. Mary talked about a time when her husband was laid off and they had no income. Policies around food bank usage meant she could only access the food bank

every eight weeks. Similar structures also restricted her access to the Salvation Army to once every three months. While research suggests that these types of policies are typically instituted to disperse aid over a greater number of people (Dachner, Gates, Poland & Tarasuk, 2009), as Mary's situation depicts, they also limit the capacity of such organizations to actually assist the very people that need their help the most.

“Like yes the food bank is there – but once you get your food, you can't go for another eight weeks....that's right eight weeks. So in between those 8 weeks you're struggling. I never had a cheque in January, cause we were on EI [referring to the Employment Insurance and Income Assistance Program] – we were waiting for EI – so for eight weeks I struggled off of my mother, other places that I had to go, like the Salvation Army – they helped me, but when you go to the Salvation Army – there's three months you can't go back – so wherever you go, there's always a cost...”

[Mary]

Kay also commented on the limitations of these programs. She had to budget her food purchases around when she was able to next access the food bank:

“Now being in the situation I'm in, financially, I've have to rethink my whole um, budgeting , my whole eating, and that kind of thing – you're waiting till next Friday till you can go to the food bank so hopefully you can get a bag of potatoes, you really have to plan more, budget more and be more creative...for sure.”

[Kay]

4.3.4 The Macrosystem

At the *Macrosystem* level, or the so-called “*blueprint*” in which all preceding systems exist and manifest, there were clear ways that cultural beliefs, societal values and embedded/historical ideologies had undoubtedly influenced the everyday experiences of KAP participants.

4.3.4.1 Neoliberalism

Results relating to women's experience of food insecurity at the *Macrosystem* level reflect the prominent neoliberal ideologies in Western society, which devalue women's caring work (particularly in feeding the family) and privilege participation in the capitalist labor force and paid employment. Through neoliberalism, there is a deliberate push towards individualism, and on consumption as a source of identity and a vehicle for social participation (Power, 2005b). This means that the responsibility of poverty and food insecurity is placed on the individuals it affects, not systems which enable it to exist. Neoliberalist views are particularly evident in the persistence of poverty and food insecurity; where individual responsibility and *choice* are predominate in current economic and social policy. We can clearly see how neoliberal ways of thinking contribute to participants' feelings of self-worth and inclusion, as mothers, as community members, and as "contributing" citizens:

"At the same point, I'm not used to being on assistance Sarah, I've got 5 years of post-secondary education, I'm a certified child and youth counselor, like I'm an educated woman and it's just a little embarrassing sometimes you know..."
[Kay]

4.3.4.2 Labels, Stigmatization and Assumptions.

Stigmatization and assumptions attached to living in a situation of poverty and food insecurity were evident for many women involved with KAP. This was the case for Kay who talked about the judgment she felt from others, particularly in relation to the use of charitable food assistance programs:

"Because it is such a small community, so if you go to the food bank, the next thing you know everybody and their grandmother knows and their talking about it...you know 'that poor girl, her husband's in jail...blah, blah, blah' – like I know right? It's pretty plain to see..."
[Kay]

Though not a personally accounted experience, one of the KAP staff members provides another example of the assumptions and stigma faced by KAP women participants and their families.

“For example, I remember this one school meeting and there’s a team of people – like there was resource, vice-principal, principle, and teachers...and this French teacher had given this child zero on a test and her comment was ‘you need to learn to think before you write’. And the child was devastated and the mother can only write name and she can’t read. So, when we go there the French teacher was quite adversarial and she said to the mother that ‘I had sent home several notes to you explaining that your child’s been having difficulty in this subject and I have had several parent meetings which you’ve been invited to and never attended’ – she has no transportation – she said you know, ‘I have the emails for all the others parents; I don’t know have an email for you’, of course she doesn’t have a computer and she reprimanded this mother and this mother was just blank – because she didn’t want to share that she was, had low-literacy.”
[KAP Staff Member]

This theme was further supported in how participants felt their children were being pigeonholed and unfairly labeled by others because of their family’s social and economic status. In one incident, Amy talked about how her son had been dubbed “*a trouble child*” by teachers in his school, and as a result, was being sent home when he acted up, reprimanded for his behaviors in front of his peer group and increasingly excluded from participating in class outings and events. This was a common topic of discussion in KAP programs; in one particular group session, one of the mothers disclosed to the group that her daughter was being called a “*welfare rat*” at school. She was visibly hurt by this remark and talked of knowing what it was like to have those stereotypes attached to her.

4.3.4.3 Devaluation of women’s unpaid work

Findings from this study raise serious concerns and questions regarding the devaluation of “*unpaid work*” as a compounding factor in women’s ability to earn a viable income. Nearly all of the women involved in KAP’s programs were considered “*stay at home*” moms. This *choice*

was usually based on individual circumstance and household finances. As Amy's experience illustrates, the devaluation and broader ideologies attached to this type of work can act to suppress women's re-entrance into paid labor once their children grow older. Amy talked about the struggle of trying to get a job after being a "stay at home" mom for several years:

"I couldn't even get hired on at McDonalds because I didn't work for 5 years because I chose to stay home with my children – that's not fair. And I have a degree – they wouldn't hire me. It was just the fact that I hadn't work for 5 years – well I'm sorry that I chose to stay home and raise my children and not allow somebody else to do it for me – that was my choice and my husband and I made that choice – he was to work and I would stay home – and now that I want to get back into the industry – it's 10 times harder because I decided to stay home and that's not right!"

[Amy]

4.3.5 The Chronosystem

The *Chronosystem* encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to participant's environment (Bronfenbrenner 1977; 1979; 1994). Certainly, there were clear links between major life transitions or significant environmental events and women's experiences with food insecurity. Of the KAP participants I spoke with through both the interview and participant observation process, many talked of the unstable environment that shaped their current reality – with many personal accounts of physical and sexual abuse, drug/alcohol addictions, teenage pregnancy, and childhoods with very little guidance or encouragement. In talking about her experiences with KAP Mary disclosed the fact that she had been molested as a child and described how this impacted her own self-worth and feelings of being loved and wanted:

"...and it (being part of KAP) really makes me feel like I'm worth it. I come from a very big family, but being molested – you just don't feel that."

[Mary]

While the above context does describe the lives of many participants of KAP, there were also some who were experiencing recent hardships. Kay and Amy seemed to speak fondly of

their family and did not point out any negative aspects of their upbringing. Both of these women also held college degrees in different fields. For Kay, worrying about having enough food was something new to her, she had five years of post-secondary education and until recently was employed in a well-paid job:

At the same point, I'm not used to being on assistance Sarah, I've got 5 years of post-secondary education, I'm a certified child and youth counselor, like I'm an educated woman... [and] I had just recently moved to NS from Ontario, was very much pregnant, found myself in a situation where my husband was incarcerated, and had zero to very little money coming in...

[Kay]

Generational poverty was prominent within KAP; several women I interacted with during my time participating in KAP programs described their own childhoods and what it was like growing up in a poor household. There were a number of women, however, where poverty and instability were not defining features of their past and instead were new and unexpected experiences. This illustrates the temporal nature of food insecurity; it also challenges the perception of employment as the primary route in the amelioration of this issue.

4.4 Section 2: Uncovering Engagement and Participation to Address Food Insecurity

Section 2 will explicate the levels in which KAP is engaged in efforts to address the issue of individual/household food security and the broader inequities that underpin this issue for all Nova Scotians. This will be done by drawing upon both KAP staff and participant perspectives from interview conversations, participant observation and document review in order to create a more complete understanding of the structure of KAP programs as well as KAP (as an organization) and the experience of those who use KAP's services. These data will be organized based on how they contextually fit within the *Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, Macro-, and Chrono-system* levels of Bronfenbrenner's framework (Bronfenbrenner 1977; 1979; 1994) in terms of their level of impact. Results from the document review process are also presented (**Table 3.** and **Table 4.**) and help to complement the qualitative inquiry with a descriptive look at KAP's engagement in partnerships and advocacy activities related to poverty and food security.

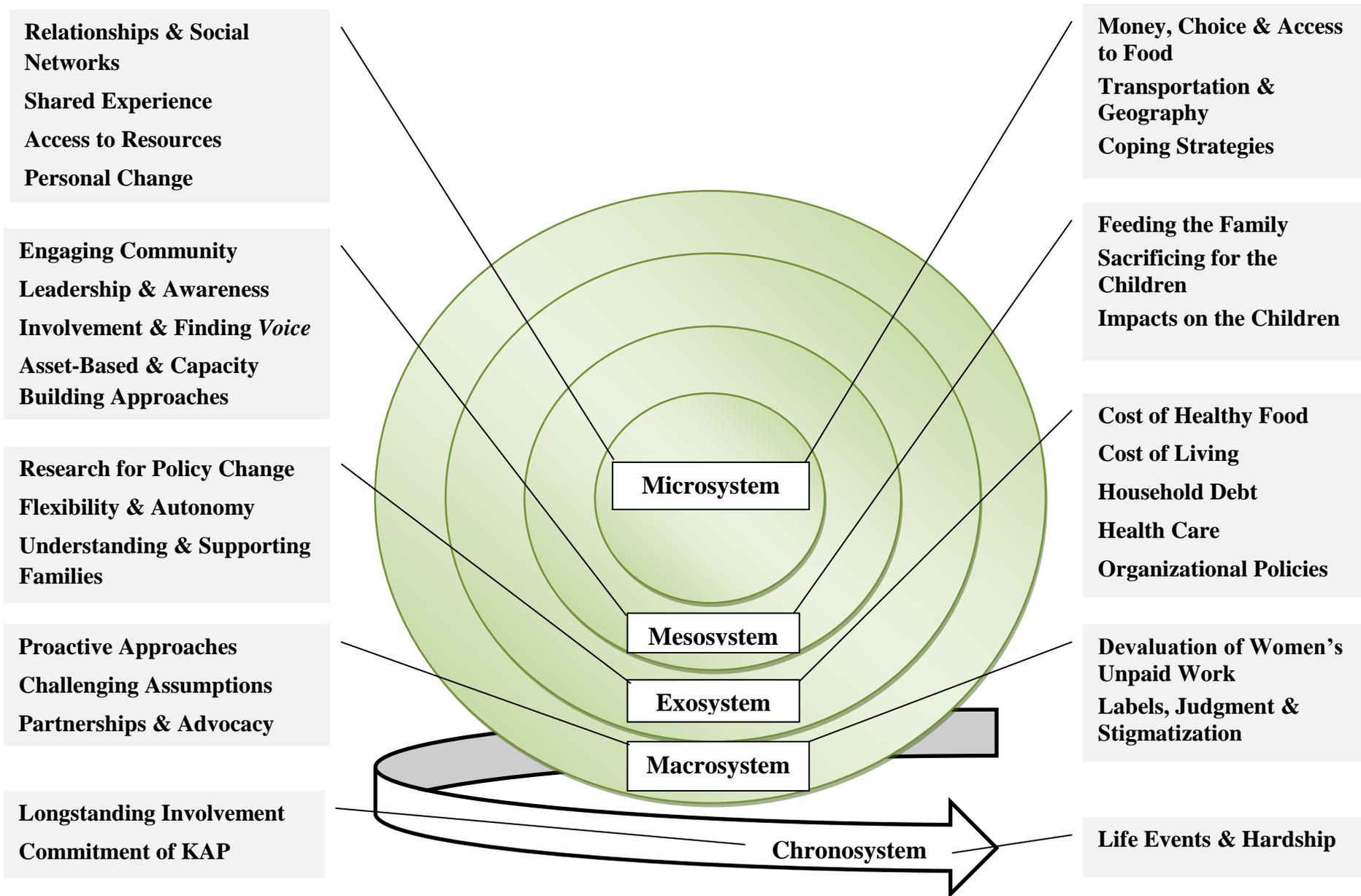


Figure 3. Contributions of Kids Action Program to Individual/Household Food Security

Table 2. Detailed List of the Contributions of KAP to Individual/Household Food Security

| Microsystem |
|---|
| <p>Relationships and Social Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone to count on; someone who cares <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>It makes me feel loved</i> • An extended family • Non-judgemental atmosphere <p>Shared Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing you're not alone • Being among others who understand your situation <p>Access to Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct access to food through KAP programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ i.e., food box program, gardening programs, snacks/meals, etc., • Indirect access to food through personal advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advocating for access to income supports, etc. • Access to information and opportunities <p>Personal Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally stronger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>'I'm a better person' – 'I am who I am today because of them'</i> |
| Mesosystem |
| <p>Engaging Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of community space for programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connecting organizations with KAP participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breaking down barriers and stereotypes • Organizations remaining involved with KAP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Donations of food/time, etc., <p>Leadership and Raising Awareness of Poverty and Food Insecurity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A by-product of their work with families • Presentations and engagement in committees and research <p>Involvement and Finding 'Voice'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Often we give participants the confidence to question</i> • Getting participants involved in research and other opportunities <p>Asset-Based and Capacity Building Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff work from a strength-based ideal • Programs aimed at self-sufficiency (not charity) |
| Exosystem |
| <p>Research for Policy Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University partnerships in community-based research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data to back up advocacy efforts (<i>'it's the language of government'</i>) <p>Flexibility and Autonomy to Address Community Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core funding that enables development of programs that are participant driven, not predetermined <p>Understanding and Supporting Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and services that reflect an understanding of the barriers faced by these families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transportation/geography, income, etc., |
| Macrosystem |
| <p>Proactive Approaches to Food Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Striving to break the cycle of poverty • Working with and educating youth <p>Partnerships and Advocacy</p> |

- Bringing a 'front line' perspective to conversations on poverty and food security
- Standing for injustices faced by participants and their families
- Partnering with community groups/agencies
 - i.e. leveraging community support & investment in issues

Challenging Assumptions and Stereotypes

- Addressing assumptions and stereotypes within the community

Chronosystem

Longstanding Involvement

- Building longstanding relationships with participants that transcend over time/ life course
- A buffer during times of hardship

Commitment to Issues of Food Insecurity

- Involvement over time in education, advocacy and awareness

Table 3. Partnership Profile for Kids Action Program (2011-2012)

| Organization Identification | Type of Organization (non-profit, for-profit, government, schools, other) | Depth of Relationship | | | | | Outcomes the Organization Contributes to: | | | Resources Provided |
|--|---|-----------------------|------------|---------|------------------|--------------|---|----------|---------------|--|
| | | Network | Cooperator | Partner | Coalition Member | Collaborator | Education | Advocacy | Public Policy | |
| Name: Kingstec Community College | School | | | Yes | | | Yes | | | Services and resources for family literacy |
| Name: Local Rotary Clubs | Non-Profit | | | Yes | | | | Yes | | Referrals and advocacy for KAP programs |
| Name: United Christian Women | Non-Profit | | | Yes | | | | Yes | | Provide space for programs and advocacy around food security |
| Name: Inter-Church Council | Non-Profit | | | Yes | | | | | | Emergency food donations |
| Name: Kingsway Assembly | Non-Profit | | | Yes | | | | | | Space for KAP programs, food donations, referrals to KAP |
| Name: Public Health (Kings & Hants) | Government | | | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes | | Community development partner, training, and referrals to KAP programs |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|-----|--|-----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| Name: NS ⁸ Department of Justice | Government | | | Yes | | | Yes | | | Parenting education, community services placements |
| Name: NS Department of Health and Wellness | Government | | | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | Healthy beginnings team participation |
| Name: Mount Saint Vincent University – Food Action Research Centre | University | | | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Partner on food security research projects with a focus on capacity building for policy change. Engagement of students. |
| Name: East Hants and East/Central Kings Health Boards | Government | Yes | | | | | Yes | Yes | | Funding and promotion for KAP programs |
| Name: Nova Scotia Nutrition Council | Non-for-profit | | | Yes | | | Yes | Yes | | Advocacy related to food security |
| Name: Various Local Elementary Schools | Schools | Yes | | Yes | | | Yes | Yes | | Space for KAP programs, referrals to programs, resources, and |

⁸ Nova Scotia

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|--|--|-----|--|--|-----|-----|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | educational programs |
| Name: Acadia University | University | | | Yes | | | Yes | Yes | | Networking, space, partnership on family programming, education for nutrition students on issues of food security, and engagement of students. |

Table 4. Log of Advocacy Activities related to Food Security for Kids Action Program Staff Members and Participants (2011-2012)

| Name of Staff Person or Partner | Date | Description of Advocacy Activity <i>(Conducting presentations, media releases, communicating with provincial stakeholders, making contacts to mobilize support, participating in food security meetings, disseminating reports, etc.)</i> | Estimated Reach | Type of Stakeholder Include all that apply <i>(Health, education, government, politicians, general public, etc.)</i> | Outcome (if any) |
|--|-------------|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| KAP Staff Member(s) | Annual | Community Workshop on Child Poverty and Food Insecurity | Hants and Kings Counties | | Increasing awareness on the issues of poverty in NS |
| KAP Staff | 2000-2012 | Nova Scotia Poverty Report Card (contributed to | Accessible online | | Increasing awareness |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|---|---|---|---|
| Member(s) | | the development of this resource through review process - providing input based on front-line experience of the issues) | for all interested parties – widespread reach | | on the issues of poverty in NS |
| KAP Staff Member(s) | 2009 | NFB Film “Four Feet Up” – contributed to the development of this documentary on child poverty and food insecurity in Nova Scotia – Presented this film in various settings and facilitated discussion on these issues. | Provincial/National | General public, health professionals, education | Increasing awareness on the issues of poverty in Nova Scotia |
| KAP Staff Member(s) | 2011 | Invited Presentation – Canadian Association of Food Studies – Title: Participatory Action Research and the Food Movement – Issues, Ideas and Insights. - Peer reviewed abstract and workshop with Dr. Patricia Williams, et. al. | National | Education and Health Professionals | Knowledge mobilization on participatory methods for community engagement and policy change on food security |
| KAP Staff Member(s) | 2010 | A Model for Sustainable Action on Food Security – International Union for Health Promotion and Education World Conference, Geneva, Switzerland - Peer reviewed abstract and presentation with Dr. Patricia Williams | Global | Health Professionals | Knowledge mobilization on participatory methods for community engagement and policy change on food security |
| KAP Staff Member(s) | 2007 | Thought About Food? Building Capacity in CAPC/CPNP for food security and policy change. Community CAPC/CPNP Atlantic Training Workshops - Invited Presentation with Dr. Patricia Williams et al. | National | Health Professionals | Knowledge mobilization on participatory methods for community engagement and policy change on food security |

4.4.1 Setting the Stage: Becoming a Participant in Kids Action Program

Generally speaking, participant's awareness of KAP programs occurred through informal channels. All the KAP participants I spoke to in the individual interviews indicated they first heard of KAP by word of mouth; typically a friend who had been or was currently involved with the organization in some way. In turn, these women then went on to tell others about their own experiences with the programs and services KAP offered, bringing even more people into the programs. Both Mary and Amy discussed this in their individual interviews:

"I've been going to the programs for about 6 years and I knew another lady, who no longer goes, but she used to all the time, and she got me into it because I was having problems with adjusting to the life of being a mom...and I have brought a couple people into the group over the years too cause I think it's some that is needed – and not just for people who have lower incomes, for anybody..."

[Amy]

"I started when [my eldest daughter] was 3 months – I was lonely, I was scared, I heard so many rumours about people taking your kids if you're not being well kept and up to date – so I got involved with XXX [referring to a KAP staff member] - a girlfriend gave me the number and I called and XXX [referring to a KAP staff member] asked me to come to the group and I did and I've been with her ever since...it's mouth to mouth. I tell people about the programs – they're there if you want them..."

[Mary]

Some women had initial reservations about their involvement with KAP based on their past experiences with other outreach programs and services. This mistrust was apparent for Amy, who in the beginning, refused to participate in KAP's programs; she assumed it was instituted as a way to monitor families and their interactions with their children. She feared that if she became involved with KAP her child may be taken from her if she was not keeping up to a preconceived set of standards.

"I did see KAP's program and I thought 'they're not taking my kid' cause that's what I understood it was, was that they just watched you and see how you work with your kid and I'm like 'No'.

[Amy]

It took meeting with KAP staff and experiencing their ways of working with people to change this perception. In the end, Amy continued to be involved with KAP for nearly 16 years - in her interview she talked lovingly about how she built a caring and trusting relationship with one particular staff member:

“Then I called [KAP staff member] and I experienced her for one day and I'm like hmmm she's not that bad of a girl...[and]...that bridge that I built between me and them – she broke that bridge, she broke that wall, every time I was stressed, she goes ‘I'm going to get through that wall you have up’ – and I'm like ‘not going to happen’, and she did it. I don't know how but she did it– she just broke through that wall and I let her in, and I see that okay you're going to push me today and she does push me and she's a great person you want to talk to – she keeps your secrets, and she's just so warm and I keep coming back..”

[Mary]

In fact, long-standing engagement with KAP and their programming was not uncommon. My observation of participants was that they tended to remain connected to KAP for years, even after their children had grown into adolescence.

4.4.2 Setting the Stage: A Profile of KAP Staff Members

Four (of seven) KAP staff members (all women) agreed to participate in the individual interview process. All had worked with KAP for more than 10 years; all held a unique position within the organization. These women also clearly shared a common individual connection to issues of social justice. In their interviews, two staff disclosed that they themselves had experienced abuse, poverty and food insecurity at different points in their lives, while other staff described growing up with parents who worked very closely with marginalized populations. These personal experiences clearly influenced their choice to seek out employment with KAP and informed their understanding of the key issues faced within the community. As one staff noted, *“I was called to this work as opposed to doing this work and discovering that these were issues.”* Another staff member talked about her first-hand understanding of what it meant to have

limited access to food, or worry about having enough to feed their children. Even now, with a secure full-time job she worried about running out of food. When asked to define what food insecurity meant for her, she replied:

“Well, the first word that pops into my head is fear. Fear of not having enough to feed your children. That’s the first thing - because I experienced it. I remember how it felt and this is a personal thing. I can afford food now. I still have that fear, I still fear running out. So for me, when I think about food insecurity – I know when people say I feel bad because I can’t feed my kids or I worry about my kids not eating or I worry about my kids not getting enough good foods – I get that. I did the macaroni and tomatoes; I did all of that crap. Even though I knew it wasn’t the most nutritious thing for my kids, at least it filled them. I mean I know there is a definition and I could rhyme off the definition for you, but for me personally, food insecurity is fear and a lack of dignity.”
[KAP Staff Member]

This same staff member felt that it was these very life experiences that made KAP unique in comparison to other community-based agencies: *“I think the other thing we have that’s unique is that we have a lot of life experience. With the folks that work with KAP. I was a single mum on social assistance, I was food insecure, I was, you know... We have somebody else who has been a single parent, you know, so we have that expertise, or that life experience that kind of, you can’t get from a book...”* [KAP Staff: 40-42] – she continued, explaining that although she felt that others working with this population could be empathetic to someone’s situation and life circumstance, until you have walked in those shoes, *“you don’t get it at a gut level”* [KAP Staff: 43]. Other researchers have highlighted discrepancies in stakeholder and household perceptions of food insecurity (Hamelin, Mercier & Bedard, 2010); these results suggest that there may be points of intersections between the experiences of KAP staff and participants. These shared experiences are apparent in the nature in which these results have been integrated and organized; where KAP staff and participants voice are often complementary to each other.

It should be noted that the experiences of staff were not kept secret from participants. Instead they were frequently used as a platform for discussion during KAP programs, which I witnessed on several occasions during my time as a participant observer. Indeed, this mutual sharing seemed to stifle judgment and create a greater sense of equity among participants and staff members; a feeling among the group that ‘we’ve all been there’.

I: “So I guess that kind of leads into... is there something that personally motivates you to stay involved or be involved in this type of work.”

*“Absolutely. I actually grew up in poverty and I grew up in an abusive home. I didn’t live in foster care – but I lived with other families at different points in time in my life – so **they** [KAP participants] **are my people**. I get them. I had food insecurity. I used to steal food when I was a little girl. From other people - I used to, in the summer time, go into their houses and open their fridge and take carrots and....it was a long time before I could speak that out loud (pauses)... so I always had a strong sense of social justice. Yeah, so it’s just so comfortable for me to be with these families and it’s just, it’s like my hood... I sometimes feel more comfortable with them than I do other parts of the population...so, like I said - I have a strong sense of social justice and helping to affect change if possible or at least preserve dignity in the lives of these individuals with their children at all ages – right up through.”*

[KAP Staff: 65-74]

Sharing these life experiences seemed to enable staff to connect with participants on a more personal level, laying a strong foundation for trusting and genuine relationships.

“I truly care about these people - and their children. So I feel that I have trusting, honest relationships with them. It’s real. They know that I care and I do. And I believe they care about me as well. And that’s a good foundation to work from in terms of understanding their needs and for them to ask things from me that they might not be able to ask of people in institutions – like their doctor or their social worker, etc. So, I feel...comfortable with these individuals.”

[KAP Staff Member]

This personal experience of living in poverty and with food insecurity meant that KAP staff approached their programs with an understanding of the barriers participants faced, particularly in relation to food access.

I: “XXX [staff member name], *what are the most significant barriers you feel participants of your program face when it comes to accessing enough healthy foods for themselves and their families?*”

“Money. A lot of people, well almost anybody in our programs are low-income. Whether their working for a wage or whether one is working, or whether it’s full time, part time, doesn’t matter, or whether they’re in receipt of income assistance. So income is huge. And people also don’t have transportation. You know, if people can get to the food bank, often they can’t get back with the stuff that they get from the food bank. So I have one woman who calls and says look, I got to go to the food bank – I can get myself there but I can’t get myself home. Well I get that. And then you got all of these people who are looking at you and down your noses if you have a cab come and get you – they can’t afford a car! Access is a barrier – income related access.”

[KAP Staff Member]

“A major one is income. Another is transportation. And the third is that, even if – and this is why we do so many innovative kinds of garden programs – even if they want a garden – they rent. So trying to do gardening and rip up the soil in a place where you’re renting, you need to go through all the stuff – plus they couldn’t even get the equipment to do that, so yeah – those are the most significant barriers – income, transportation and even if they wanted to grow it – if we didn’t support that somehow, there’s no way.

[KAP Staff Member]

This understanding and staff’s close relationships with participants meant that KAP was sometimes “*ahead of the game*” in terms of their understanding of the key issues at a local level. For example, all were well aware of ‘food insecurity’ and its accompanying issues before they even knew or heard of the defined concept in the literature:

“I think that we’re a little bit ahead of the game; because we work so closely with participants we kind of know what the issues are before they are named. So, food insecurity - I was aware of that before I knew that’s what it was called...”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.3 The Microsystem

4.4.3.1 Relationships and Social Networks

Perhaps one of the most pervasive themes to emerge through this study relates to the types of relationships and supportive networks formed among KAP participants and staff members. As many of the participants pointed out, these relationships did not form overnight, it

took time to build that level of trust and mutual respect: “I took it day by day and it took a lot of years to get to know her and to tell her things about myself and for her to understand what I’m like.” As a participant observer, I immediately sensed the familial nature of these relationships. Participants would often share a story or experience during group and look to staff to gauge their reactions or seek their acceptance, encouragement and guidance. During one of the last group sessions I attended, several young women broke down to tears when discussing their unique and emotional bond with KAP staff members. One woman described a KAP staff as the ‘mother figure’ she never had. For her, this staff member was someone she could count on and look up to. She spoke of how much it meant to have someone who believed in her when no one else did; to have someone who really cared. It was clear that KAP programs provided participants with a safe, warm environment where they could be themselves, talk freely about their lives and feelings and as a result, build trusting and caring relationships with others. These observations were reinforced by my conversations with these women; in their interviews, both Amy and Mary described their relationships with staff:

I: And what is it that’s kept you involved over these 16 years...what keeps you coming back?

P: Oh my god. That brings tears to my eyes. Um, [KAP Staff] - she’s the sister that you always wanted. I was abused and I was molested and when I told [KAP Staff], she always – I don’t get a lot of hugs, I never hugged in my life – I believe that it’s a no-no. One day we were leaving and it was the summer and [KAP Staff] was hugging everybody and I backed off and she said ‘I’m going to hug you’ and I said ‘I wouldn’t recommend it’ and [KAP Staff] said ‘no I mean it’ and I said ‘I mean it, please don’t do it’ and she said ‘I have to do it’. And I broke down. And she asked me why am I crying and I said – cause I never had a hug in my life [starts to cry] and it really broke my heart and she kept hugging me. It was a really emotional experience. Now I do let people that I like hug me. So when I see her it’s that big hug, even when she drops me off Tuesday I just have to have that big hug, because it makes me feel that somebody out there loves me so much and it really brings tears to my eyes... cause I really need her to tell me, you know what – ‘I love you today’ and it really makes me feel like I’m worth it. I come from a very big family, but being molested – you just don’t feel that.”

[Mary]

Relationships were further fostered by KAP's non-judgmental atmosphere. As Mary noted, *they make you feel comfortable so you can always be yourself and not be judged*. Further supporting this, Kay pointed out in her interview how she felt completely at ease talking to a KAP staff member for the first time about her financial situation and need for help:

"Oh for sure, there were no judgments there, I just went to her and was like hey man I just had my baby and I'm broke – can you help me out? And she was like yeah I can! And I didn't feel uncomfortable explaining...I mean it's not a situation that everyone is in, but explaining it to her - there was absolutely no judgment, it was like 'hey hunny how can we help' – I appreciated that."

[Kay]

The feeling of KAP as an "extended family" also encompassed the relationships formed between KAP participants. Although conflict and disagreement did arise, these women seemed to provide each other with support and understanding within this setting. There was even a sense of protectiveness among group members (in KAP programs) when new participants entered this dynamic.

"I do protect all the girls in group [referring to KAP programs] because they are my family."

[Mary]

4.4.3.2 Shared Experience

Even if they were not physically or geographically isolated, the sense of aloneness in circumstance was clearly alienating for this group of women. KAP groups and programs seemed to provide participants with an opportunity to be around others who understood how they were feeling and what they were going through. This sense of shared experience was clear when I entered the programs. Initially, I felt much like an outsider to this dynamic – as someone who did not really understand what these women were going through at a personal level. During one of my first visits to a KAP program, I described in my field notes the allure to share your story with

the group, almost a rite of passage in terms of fitting in and gaining acceptance. In her interview Amy talked about what it meant to her to be able to talk and connect with others who could relate to the obstacles she had faced in her life:

“Just having other families, knowing that you’re not the only one in that position, you’re not the only one who has made those mistakes, or have been in one of those positions where you feel completely alone and sometimes it’s really nice to know that you’re not the only one. Cause even though, realistically you know that – you don’t feel that – so it’s nice to know that there is somebody out there that’s feeling the same way you do – that’s going through the same problems that you are – so in that way it has helped a lot for me.”

[Amy]

Having just moved to the community, and as a brand new participant of KAP’s programs, Kay looked at her involvement with KAP as a way to get to know others and build social networks and relationships.

“Just because, like I said being new to the community – I hardly know anyone, so this is just a good way for me to network and a way for me to meet other new moms and that kind of thing. I think it was XXX [referring to a KAP staff member] who said to me there was a playgroup down at the Noel Church, and my son’s name is XXX and once XXX is a little older we will be able to spend some time down there and I wouldn’t have known that if it wasn’t for XXX [referring to KAP staff member] giving me some feelers to let me know what was available...”

[Kay]

Although not straightforward, one staff described how she felt their relationships with participants and the support they provided to families as an organization, helped people to move forward in their lives:

“I think everybody wants to move one, everybody wants to move ahead and we have a lot of success, like people who have managed to get through that rough time, that period in their life and move on. I don’t know, I think by us supporting - it allows them to...I don’t think we entirely direct people but we plant seeds or direct a little bit in that you just maybe give them the options or put the cards out on the table and say you can go these routes...and some people take them and run with them and other people don’t it’s just, it depends on where they are in their lives at that moment...we’re always hoping that someone will pick it up and run...”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.3.3 Access to Resources

Perhaps one of the most apparent and immediate ways that KAP impacted food security in the lives of participants and their families was by mediating improved access to fresh, nutritious foods. Throughout my time at KAP, one thing became certain – though its purpose varied from being “*quietly in the background*” to the central focus of programming - food was at the centre of everything KAP offered. As a participant observer, I frequently helped staff and participants prepare meals and snacks for their regular programming – plenty of coffee, tea, milk, fresh fruit and vegetables and cheese and crackers were always readily available for attendees and their children. As one staff noted when asked about the role of food in KAP:

“Oh my god! Well, it plays a really important role within KAP. We do not offer any program without having food”

[KAP Staff Member]

Staff members were also cognoscente of the fact that food was sometimes the draw for people to participate in their programs. They knew that some of the women and children who attended their parenting and family classes often came without anything to eat. They also knew that what they offered at their classes may be the only healthy foods that individual eats on that particular day. Although it’s presence was intentional, several staff noted it was important not make a big deal out of having food available, it was simply there.

*“There is always food there, there is always as much as you can eat there and its always healthy because...we know that often times that might be the only good meal or healthy food that a person might eat that day. I think sometimes it’s the draw. I do know for a fact that a lot of the children come and they haven’t had a meal yet or breakfast.....and they know, **they know** that food is going to be there. It’s just a given, whatever we do there is food there.”*

[KAP Staff Member]

From a participant perspective, all of the women interviewed talked about how, at some point in time, their involvement with KAP had a significant and direct impact on their family’s

immediate access to food. These conversations typically focused on KAP's food-centered programs, such as the Great Beginnings Food Box⁹ and the individual and community gardening programs offered throughout the summer months. Several women I talked to, both during my time participating in KAP programs and in the individuals interview process, indicated that at some point in time, KAP's Great Beginnings Food Box was their family's only reliable source of fresh food.

I: So thinking about your involvement with KAP – has your participation impacted your ability to get enough healthy foods for your family do you think?

P: It did in the beginning; it really did with the food box and everything because we physically lived off those boxes. If it wasn't for those boxes, we would have been living off Kraft dinner and fries and cheap stuff – cause that is all we could afford...They [KAP Staff] are the ones that are helping provide those fruits and vegetables and extra things that people can't afford, and even if you cannot afford to have the boxes, but you need them – they'll still drop them to you...[and] they really do provide the families that aren't able to have the resources to get them, or have the income to get them, and they do provide that..
[Amy]

“In the beginning, where we had no money, so the food box that they provided – they paid for those food boxes, because we couldn't, and it was only \$15 but at that point we didn't have the \$15 either, so they pretty well made sure we ate for a few months...”
[Mary]

New to the program, Kay described the feeling of receiving her food box as “like Christmas once a month.” As a new mom living on Income Assistance, fresh fruits and vegetables were not an affordable option - the food box helped to improve her access to fresh produce during a critical time in her child's growth and development.

“Well, like something like fresh fruit if you're living on assistance and going to the food bank – it's not in your diet. Pretty much, so just making something that [the food box] available to families, for me it makes the world of difference... Oh, to bite into an apple...it shouldn't be that way, but it is what it is, especially for kids, it's important for young people to develop good habits so they don't have bad ones starting out and their

⁹ A year-round, monthly delivery of fresh produce for eligible participants of Great Beginnings (prenatal mothers with babies up to 6 months of age)

younger days or bad modeling, parents not cooking home food, not cooking vegetables, but taking the time to do those kinds of thing, so I'm really looking forward to when my son is old enough so I can take some of my vegetables and puree them to make homemade baby food....I know exactly what's going into it and I'm making it myself, and if it weren't for that program I wouldn't have that bag of carrots once a month. It's that easy..."

[Kay]

These feelings were not unique to the women in this study; previous evaluations of Great Beginning's Food Box Program illustrate the value participants place on receiving this monthly allotment of fresh produce (Williams & Reimer, unpublished). What's more, in this same evaluation, women identified paying a small subsidized fee for their Food Box (as opposed to receiving it for free) as a key contributor in their decision to actually participate in this program. Similarly, the women in my thesis study did not want a hand-out – in fact; it seemed that they appreciated having the option to pay for your food box if you were able. Amy was quick to emphasize the fact that when she could, she *always* tried to contribute something towards her food box:

In the beginning, where we had no money, so the food box that they [referring to KAP] provided – they paid for those food boxes, because we couldn't, and it was only \$15 but at that point we didn't have the \$15 either, so they pretty well made sure we ate for a few months. And when I was able to pay, then I did – and sometimes it wasn't the full \$15 but at least I tried.

[Amy]

Mary talked about how her involvement with KAP introduced her to gardening and growing her own foods at home:

"Being involved with CAPC has given me a chance to be in the garden and grow things that are healthy. The garden – oh my god, I've never grown so many things in my life! Peas, split peas – I would eat them by the truck load"

[Mary]

Outside of KAP's structured programs, staff members had a further impact on participant's food security by playing the role of liaison in terms of seeking out emergency food supports for participants who may contact them in need of more food:

"I mean there's rules around food banks – you can only go once every however long – so we do have people in the community who are there, who've said to us – if you really need something let us know – so we can get an gift card or whatever to tie somebody over, we've been able to do that kind of thing or access different resources..."

[KAP Staff Member]

They also helped impact women's food security in an indirect way through their knowledge of the systems central in participant's everyday lives, particularly the Department of Community Services (DCS) Income Assistance and Employment Insurance Program. Often the women involved with KAP did not know about the supports available to them, nor did they have the confidence, voice, or understanding of the system to fight for the allowances in which they were eligible for. One staff talked about working with a woman who waited nearly four months to receive her child tax credit after her child had been reprimanded and returned:

"We advocate for resources for people, particularly if somebody has been involved for family children services, because they've been involved and their children have been apprehended and they've lost their child tax credit and they get their kid back it takes 2 months or whatever, or maybe three, maybe longer depending. There was one case that I was involved in not too long ago, the child came back in November and the mom thought she would get her child tax credit in January and I advocated for food vouchers for her – not, like I don't want her to have to pay it back...give it! So that happened and I did that a couple of times over Christmas. So January comes around and we still don't have her CTC and I was thinking what the hell is going on, so she calls CTC and says okay – I should have had it and they say oh, well we haven't had confirmation from the department that you have your child back? Are you kidding me? Somebody forgot to fax the f-ing paper. So I called. I was pissed. I called and said what is going on? Track it down. Nobody sent the paper – she didn't get it till March – I said, alright, you better cough up. So they did – they weren't happy about it. I don't care. That's crazy! Their fault! Just because it's not an emergency to them, doesn't mean it's not an emergency...."

[KAP Staff Member]

Another staff talked of how confusing these systems can be, particularly for women with lower literacy and various other stressors and barriers in their lives.

“It’s hard. I mean I have trouble navigating these things and I can read well and I don’t have a lot of the other pressures that a lot of the other women in our programs have. So just having someone there that says, and XXX’s [referring to KAP staff member] the best at it, because she knows their policy book better than they do in some cases and can say well she qualifies for this because she has this condition or you know, whatever.”
[KAP Staff Member]

This all had an impact on participants’ income-related food security. Staff felt that by helping women access these income supports meant they had more money available to put towards household expenditures, including nutritious food:

“Like if you are in a situation where we can advocate for somebody to get a maintenance check, for example – that’s going to impact, if they have more money coming into their home they can buy more food for their kids, uh, and themselves, so those kinds of things. I think going with someone to DCS and helping them access everything that they can access...”
[KAP Staff Member]

From a participant perspective, being involved with KAP meant always having someone to turn to – helping them to access information and other resources - essentially, providing a voice and champion in their corner.

“They are there to help me in any way they can, whether it be an appointment, food, anything like that, they were always right there and that was something that was above and beyond for me. Like their job – I know they get paid to do these things; they go above and beyond all the time [and] they [referring to KAP] have resources and ways around things to help you that most people didn’t even know were available...”
[Amy]

I: *Other than the programs, is there any other ways that your participation with KAP has affected your ability to get food?*

P: *“Um, hearing and speech, [a KAP staff member] got me through those appointments; eyes, hearing aids, anything I needed for my kids, she gave me the information to that to help me for my children...”*
[Mary]

This support was unlike women’s experiences with other community-based programs where they were faced with countless limitations and often had to wait for help. They clearly felt someone would always be there no matter the circumstance:

“It’s just nice knowing there is somebody there – it really, really is. You don’t have to talk to them on a daily basis – but they are right there if you ever need anything. I mean even now, going in for surgery tomorrow – they are all, if you need anything, if you need a break – call me. And I got that from everybody yesterday at group. And it’s nice. You feel like you’re loved, you feel like you’re wanted.”

[Amy]

[Two of KAP staff members] *have changed my life completely – they’re so warm and friendly, when you need somebody – they’re right there.*

[Mary]

These findings echoed KAP staff’s perspective on how they differ from other programs and systems these participants are used to dealing with. They realize the emergent nature of participant’s needs and ensure they act whenever possible:

“No one will forget about you – you can tell someone what’s going on and something will happen – it’s not going to sit on the back burner for 6 months or for a year – you’re not going to be sitting in a back log waiting for someone to help you I think we all try to help right away and we all realize that help needs to come right away, and so we act. We don’t sit on things...we act when we can....”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.3.4 Personal Change

Both Mary and Amy (long-standing participants of KAP programs) commented on feeling as though they had gone through some type of personal change as a result of their involvement with KAP. One woman talked about feeling emotionally stronger, while another felt that she owed who she was today to KAP staff and participants.

“No, they (other community programs in the area) aren’t like KAP’s. You feel so much love there, even the groups – over the 15 years I have been with them I have never felt so much worth living than now and I have made myself stronger... Like if XXX [referring to KAP staff member] ever needs a speaker for CAPC, one of us would do it – and say this is what we experienced, made us a better person, made me stronger, made me a better person today than I was 20 years ago...”

[Mary]

“I owe a lot to them and I am who I am today because of them...”

[Amy]

4.4.4 The Mesosystem

4.4.4.1 Engaging Community

Because KAP did not have its own central facility, almost all of KAP programs were held in donated community space. This included, but was not limited to, the use of local churches and community centers for cooking and parenting classes, and a local farm for their community gardening program. One of the many benefits to hosting programs in a variety of locations within the area was that it intentionally and sometimes, unintentionally, engaged other organizations in KAP's work and highlighted the issues faced by low-income families:

“And I think actually, one of the reasons we have our programs in community buildings is because – we don't have any place else – but I do think it is beneficial, in lots of ways, not just from a geographical standpoint of course, for example, our work at [a local church], you know, and then all the sudden we have people that are like wow, maybe we could do something more than provide space and we always seem to have that warmth around once we get somewhere and get to do these things, people want to help...”
[KAP Staff Member]

In fact, this sort of engagement was exemplified during my time attending KAP programs; a group of women from one of the churches where a particular class was held every Tuesday voluntarily started to make lunch every week for the women and their children. Furthermore, during this lunch, these individuals would sit down with participants to eat and talk. This was brought up during several staff interviews; many felt that this was this type of community engagement was essential in terms of starting to break through the barriers and stereotypes held by those within their community:

“I do a group every Tuesday and women from that church (and I mean we're not religious don't get me wrong) but we use space in different churches and they're now making lunch for the people that go to parenting every week. For free! Holy crow! And the minister stopped me last week and said 'is there anything else we can do to support you?'”

I: *“And in addition to making the meals they are sitting down with us...”*

“They are! And getting to know people and their stories. Those barriers, those stereotypes are being cracked a little bit. There’s an understanding that happens that we know....but not necessarily everybody else knows...”

[KAP Staff Member]

Because of these kinds of connections, there were several organizations that continued to support KAP programs through volunteering their time and providing food donations.

“I mean there’s rules around food banks – you can only go once every however long – so we do have people in the community who are there, who’ve said to us – if you really need something let us know...”

[KAP Staff Member]

They also partnered with a Community Supported Agriculture in the area who committed to donating six of their farm shares to participants:

“We have [local CSA], and [this local CSA] donates, probably, six shares right now. And if somebody doesn’t pick up their share they have a list of other people that they just take the food box to.”

[KAP Staff Member]

In return, as an organization, KAP tried to support local business and local food production as much as possible:

“We’ve changed our way of doing things over the years as we’ve grown as we’ve learned more, as we’ve been more involved with food insecurity and food security work, for example, we, for the most part, don’t get me wrong – we still get banana’s, there are things that we still get. However, for the most part we try to get food that is in season and produced locally. Whether we’re doing cooking workshops, or parenting workshops, or children’s programs or whatever, it doesn’t matter what we are doing. We have food and we try to make it in season and local.”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.4.2 Leadership and Raising Awareness of Poverty and Food Insecurity

In terms of raising awareness in the community of issues of poverty and food insecurity, many of the staff felt that over time, it had *“just happened”* as a bi-product of their work with families. There was a sense, however, that because their main focus was to support families,

raising awareness among community partners was happening at a very slow pace, and not to the extent that it needed to:

“Well Sarah, here is the way I think about that. It’s snail pace, because – you know how many hours we work and our focus is on the participants and just dealing with their crises from one day, one moment, to the next. And as a result of that work awareness happens in the community. But it would be impossible at least with the budget that we have, and the staff that we have, to formally address educating communities and partners the way that I see needs to happen, the way that I believe it needs to happen – but we don’t have the resource to do that – we don’t have it on any level – but it does happen as a after fact of our work – but not the way that it needs to happen.”

[KAP Staff Member]

“I think we’ve been working behind the scenes for a really long time and now were becoming a little more public, and people know you XXX [referring to KAP staff member] is – there’s no mistaken who XXX [referring to KAP staff member] is, and I think were also getting into schools, and church communities know who we are – places where they would see people in need....as far as the general public goes though, I’m not so sure.”

[KAP Staff Member]

Staff members did highlight, however, KAP’s leadership as advocates for social justice within their community. As they described, community members had a good sense of what KAP represented when they came into a situation. As one staff stated:

“I mean – XXX and XXX [referring to two KAP staff members], are out there, like, people know who they are, they know who we are, they know- they see us coming, who we are and what we’re representing. And its, often times, it’s when things are not right, when there’s an injustice, and we’re in there, you know, to straighten out a few people – not in that way, but just like ‘in case you weren’t aware’...”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.4.3 Involvement and “Finding Voice”

By providing participants with opportunities to become involved, one staff member felt that KAP was helping women living in at-risk situations to find their voice, and move in positive ways in their lives. As an example of the types of activities KAP links participants to, this staff talked of her (and KAP’s) connection to the Participatory Food Costing Project out of Mount Saint Vincent University; specifically the respectful ways this project engaged those

experiencing food insecurity in the research process and the impact this had on the women involved. She described how this woman, through her association with KAP, became involved with food costing and went through a personal transformation. Initially shy and withdrawn, this woman went on to speak publically at a conference in PEI about her personal experience with food insecurity. This staff felt that this was the type of transformation that could really impact and change these women's lives:

“Well education is part of it, and getting people involved in research. So the Food Costing Project for example, we've been involved with Food Costing out of the Mount with Patty Williams since it began. And I can remember when I first met her, she came talking of participatory action research and what that meant and I thought, yeah sure, prove it to me. Cause I didn't believe it. I had never met a researcher who actually stood by what they said in terms of that kind of thing and it was respectful. So after a bit and after I got over – well I didn't get over my skepticism for a long time. But we [KAP] became involved anyway, people were treated with respect, they were compensated for childcare and travel – because that is significant. When you're volunteering for something it costs you. And people don't realize that – they want people to volunteer – they want people living in low-income circumstances who can't afford to volunteer - and that may sound really weird, because you think well what is there? Well there is childcare, because often people don't encourage you to bring your children, there's transportation – that's an issue – so you've got all of these barriers and they [Food Costing Project] addressed all of these barriers. I remember one woman in particular, and there's many but this one woman springs to mind – she had called me and just wanted support around parenting and so I invited her to a play group and she wasn't willing to come – she said no, I just want somebody to talk to, I don't really like going out. So I went over and met her and went to her home a couple of times and talked to her and after a while she got comfortable enough to come out to a play group and that's where other parent's brought their children and so then she met some people and then she started coming to parent education group and then she started getting involved in other things and then she got involved in food costing and then she went to a conference over on the Island, PEI, and anyway we were talking about food costing and she said you know what, 'two years ago I wouldn't open my mouth, she said I wouldn't even hardly leave my house, but' she said, 'now - try to stop me.' And she talked in public about food insecurity and how that felt for her. And it was such an empowering kind of – like the transformation was absolutely incredible. So what we see is that people become...because we get them involved in all kinds of things - they just... the find their voice and then they move in amazing directions.”

[KAP Staff Member]

As another staff put it, *often we give people the confidence to question* [KAP Staff; 439], meaning that through their programming and relationships, they try to help build participant's self-confidence and provide them with the tools, knowledge and support to make positive changes in their lives:

I mean it's great to do nutrition education – but if a bag of oranges costs \$3 or you can buy a pasta dinner for the same price – that's a meal and it fills bellies, whereas oranges are a snack. So I think that definitely people are more – often we give people the confidence to question. I think that we give people the tools that sometimes they need. [and] Some of the women in our programs have been involved in the food costing and those kinds of things – so that's I think a really positive thing, having people aware of what it costs and being able to sort of do some of that work themselves – I think it gives people a lot of confidence, well more confidence and more of a self-sufficiency, which is really what we want to work towards...
[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.4.4 Asset-Based and Capacity Building Approaches

Underpinning all of KAP programs and interactions with participants was a guiding philosophy of working from an asset-based, rather than deficit, ideal – staff talked about how they always tried to enter a situation looking at the positives and building on what was working for the individual or family. As one staff noted, there were enough people in these women's lives telling them what they were lacking or doing wrong:

“Um, we are strength-based, and again, that's a term that's thrown around, I think, however, and I don't mean to say ‘oh – look at us’ but, seriously, we really are. I mean we go into a situation looking at what are the positives? What are the things that we can build on? Because there are enough folks out there telling people what they're lacking. They don't need it from us too.”
[KAP Staff Member]

Aligning with their ways of working with participants, the majority of KAP programming positioned as capacity-building, rather than charity-based approaches to food security, helping women build knowledge, skills and self-sufficiency around food. When asked why they choose community-based food programs such as community and individual gardening, communal

cooking, etc., rather than food charity programs, nearly all staff commented on the lack of dignity associate with “hand-outs”.

“Why do we choose to do community food programs vs. food pantries? Well simple answer? One line answer?2 Receiving food, from a charity model is not dignified. Period. And so, you know that old adage – if you give a man a fish, if you teach him to fish, you feed him forever...well that’s what we do; we don’t to just give people hand outs. People don’t want handouts, people don’t want to be treated that way, people want to help themselves, so we figure out ways that we can, that’s all. That’s what it is for us. When we look at any program that we do, what’s the most dignified way that we can do it... [and] That’s what it is for me. What would I want? If it were me – would I want somebody delivering a box to my house that I wasn’t paying for, or go to a food bank and stand in a line or sit in a line, you know and have people ask me questions that are none of their fucking business frankly. Or would I want somebody just to help me. Teach me.”
[KAP Staff Member]

“So that was right from the get-go. And then as we developed programs and kind of know that food was an issue for people we continued, of course providing food at every program that we did – we also started incorporating other programs – like cooking workshops – not because people did know how to cook necessarily – and sometimes that was the issue - but because it was a way to have people take food home without feeling like it was a handout, because they were involved in it.”
[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.5 The Exosystem

4.4.5.1 Research for Policy Change

One staff identified partnering with universities as an important way that KAP is involved in affecting policy change for improved food security. Their involvement allowed them to bring forth the issues faced in their community; it also gave them credible data to support their advocacy efforts, as staff put it, *it’s the language of government.*

“And we can help from a policy standpoint - we can make some of the issues that people are faced with, we can help bring awareness of that...but partnering with the universities has been really great thing I think – because that’s the language of government...so government may or may not hear that...”
[KAP Staff Member]

Examples of community-based research in which KAP is involved as a partner include the aforementioned Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project, as well as the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) – Activating Change Together for Community Food Security, both out of Mount Saint Vincent University. The executive director of KAP acts as part of the management team for both projects; KAP’s surrounding community was also chosen one of the many sites for the multiple case study research for the CURA.

“At a provincial level we’re [KAP] involved with the CURA - the community university research alliance – ACT for Community Food Security and that at a community level – we’re one case community –and we’ve got participants involved there...”
[KAP Staff Member]

One staff commented on the importance of their director’s participation in multiple food security related projects and committees in terms of leadership and motivating other staff to also become involved in food insecurity work. This role was further significant in bringing real community issues and experiences to research and policy discussions.

“Well I think that – I can’t speak specifically about the committees that XXX’s [referring to KAP staff member] on but I know she’s on a provincial committee addressing food insecurity and she’s on a national committee as well and I think that – that’s really important as the director for us – to have a representative that is saying these are the issues. It’s one thing if professors have their studies - that’s important work, but it’s really important to have somebody that’s front line that really knows the individuals involved and what it really tastes like and looks like and so I think that’s important and the rest of us, you know – I’m asked to speak at different places sometimes, as is XXX [referring to KAP staff member] all the time.”
[KAP Staff Member]

As a result of KAP’s involvement in these initiatives, KAP participants were also engaged in these meetings and conversations. During my time at KAP, I took part in one of several community luncheons, hosted as part of the CURA: ACT for CFS project, where KAP

participants partook in a world cafe process discussing issues and solutions to food insecurity in their community.

4.4.5.2 Flexibility and Autonomy to Address Community Needs

All of the KAP staff I spoke with named the autonomy and flexibility they were granted the use of their core (federal) funding as enabling them to tailor programs to meet the needs of their participants and support their participation in these programs. One staff member describes how critical this flexibility is to their work within the community:

“Most, if not all other agencies and organizations have very strict rules and policies around how that money is divided and spent, where we have some autonomy over that... . So, we can hold programs based on what participants want – not what we’re dictated to do like many other agencies – for example – [name of provincial organization] have very strict rules about when they enter a participant’s home - which create barriers and create distrust, right from the get-go. Whereas we don’t have those barriers – we have lots of policies to keep us safe and smart, or conscious – but we’re not limited to where we can go and what we can do - and that’s participant driven – right, that’s foundational as opposed to coming from up here (gestures high up) – its coming from the people who require it – so that’s why we can be effective in our work – cause its addressing the need a people say – not what we say.”

[KAP Staff Member]

Another staff member described, this federal funding supported KAP to engage in *true community development work*; this freedom and flexibility was seen as part of what differentiated KAP from other community-based programming.

And I think too that we have the ability that lots of organizations, that are like ‘machines’ who have policies...that, you know [...].So we can do transportation, we can do food, we don’t have those limits set and part of that is where we get out funding, like PHAC is really good about letting us address the issues in our community and the needs in our community and do true community development work, without saying, ‘oh, but you can’t do that, and you can’t do that, and oh, wait a minute! You can’t do that either.’

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.5.3 Understanding and Supporting Families

All the staff I spoke with talked of personal connections to issues of social justice; many with firsthand experience of what it was like to live in poverty and experience food insecurity.

As one staff members described:

“I actually grew up in poverty and I grew up in an abusive home. I didn’t live in foster care – but I lived with other families at different points in time in my life – so they’re my people. I get them. I had food insecurity.”

[KAP Staff Member]

One staff member felt that these principles and experiences enabled KAP to be *ahead of the game* in their understanding of the barriers and needs of their participants. These types of experiences were felt to be integral to the success of KAP, particularly their ability to develop relationships with their participants and meaningful programs; it was also felt to be a unique feature of their work as a community-based organization.

“I think that we’re a little bit ahead of the game; because we work so closely with participants we kind of know what the issues are before they are named. So, food security, I was aware of that before I knew that’s what it was called. Or food insecurity. I think the other thing we have that’s unique is that we have a lot of life experience. With the folks that work with KAP. I think that that’s true. I was a single mum on social assistance, I was food insecure, I was, you know....etc, etc. We have somebody else who has been a single parent, you know, so we have that expertise. Or that life experience that kind of, you can’t get from a book.”

[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.6 The Macrosystem

4.4.6.1 Proactive Approaches

Several staff spoke of how they viewed their work with children of low-income families and the systems they interact with, as the proactive approach to addressing food insecurity long-term. There were numerous programs offered through KAP that aimed to build skills and confidence among these children and ensure they do not fall behind their peers in terms of their

overall development. The pre-school program was an example of one such initiative, aiming to help bring these children up to the level of their peers for when they start school:

“You know, swimming – their children can’t do swimming lessons – so we go swimming every second Wednesday and it’s the only opportunity for these children to learn how to swim – to keep them on an equal footing with their peers when they start school – all of those things are so important. XXX [referring to KAP staff member] and XXX [referring to KAP staff member] do a pre-school program every spring to get children who are turning 5 ready to start school. Its intensive – its 3-days a week, full days and it helps to bring our participants children on again, on an equal playing field to other children when they start – SO important. So that’s where those programs – we recognize – you see they don’t go to daycare or to nursery school – so we created one for them.”
[KAP Staff Member]

Others were focused on promoting good health through exercise and nutrition. One staff commented on how she felt these types of programs can have significant impacts on the cyclic patterns of poverty and food insecurity.

“Rather than knowing disease is going to happen because we have all these problems and then investing a lot of money you know it’s sort of like the justice system – we’re investing all this new money into jails – new jails – what about investing it into programs to prevent it in the first place, which is related to what we are talking about as well. If you have a child who’s obese and poor and he’s 14 and he’s bullied at school, and he drops out, and he does drugs because he needs to feel important and you know that whole cycle – whereas really, when you really think about it – the food security is the foundation of changing that child’s life. If he wasn’t obese, if he had good nutrition his brain would work better, he could be involved with sports potentially, he would be stronger, and he might not be bullied – now maybe that’s a little simplistic – but me, I actually believe it’s the foundation – it’s the proactive approach.”
[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.6.2 Challenging Assumptions and Stereotypes

Improving food security for women involved in this study and others in facing similar situations throughout Nova Scotia means addressing the broader ideologies and inequities that underpin and reinforce issues of poverty. The lack of understanding within the community of the complexity of these issues often presented itself as judgment and stigmatization – where blame was placed on the individual rather than the systems in which they are embedded. One staff

member talked about being present on several occasions where KAP participants were subjected to these assumptions:

“Well, it’s...you know, these individuals walk through the world with judgment that we have no idea about – I mean I suppose if you were exposed to racism or other judgments, but you know – these individuals will go to the grocery line up and have the checkout person judge the content of what their buying or question...and so does their doctor – their doctor, I’ve been at many appointments where the doctor has said well you know – “you need to pay attention to your diet because you can’t be eating well...” and sometimes the participant doesn’t understand – well “I feed my kids! – I feed my kids – they’re not hungry! [and] I remember this one school meeting and there’s a team of people – like there was resource, vice-principal, principle, etc, teachers...and this French teacher had given this child zero on a test and her comment was ‘you need to learn to think before you write’. And the child was devastated and the mother can only write her name and she can’t read. So, when we go there the French teacher was quite adversarial and she said to the mother that ‘I had sent home several notes to you explaining that your child’s been having difficulty in this subject and I have had several parent meetings which you’ve been invited to and never attended’ – she has no transportation – she said you know, ‘I have the emails for all the others parents; I don’t know have an email for you’, of course she doesn’t have a computer and she reprimanded this mother and this mother was just blank – because she didn’t want to share that she had low-literacy...”
[KAP Staff Member]

She felt that in order to effect long term change, a two-tiered approach to education and awareness was needed; increasing self-efficacy for those directly affected by food insecurity while also reaching out to the general population in an attempt to change the perceptions and beliefs that perpetuate this issue. As indicated in **Table 4**, part of KAP’s contribution to improving food security happened through their widespread knowledge mobilization efforts. Kids Action Program staff members were frequently asked to present on issues of poverty and food insecurity at various levels (from local schools to government and academic panels).

“So, I think that if we can provide more of that kind of education to community that yes, it [poverty] is there – you need to talk to somebody about it – you need to talk to your kids, you need to talk to you MLA, you need to talk to your church groups, you know – that it’s there, it’s very real, and it’s, instead of placing judgment on people that live in circumstances of poverty, what can we do as a community to help change that and who’s door do we need to knock on to do that...”
[KAP Staff Member]

4.4.6.3 Partnerships and Advocacy

As indicated in **Table 3**, KAP has built an intricate web of community partnerships that transcend across multiple sectors. These connections serve a multitude of purposes in terms of KAP's contribution to food security; at one end of the spectrum, this includes donations of food and resources from local organizations for families, at the other end, it includes collaboration between KAP and universities in community-based research for policy change. It was clear that these partnerships were not only critical to the sustainability of KAP's work with at-risk populations, but also their presence within the community and province as an organization working towards long-term change.

Whether it was making sure an individual had access to adequate supports, or bringing issues of poverty and food access to the table at regional, provincial and national conversations, advocacy was clearly embedded within KAP's work. When asked to speak of their involvement in advocacy work, one staff member stated that is inherent in everything they do – they never stopped talking about the issues that were present:

I: “So, can you speak to your or others involvement in advocacy around poverty or food insecurity...”

P: “I think in everything we do, in everything we do – every single thing. We're either advocating for an individual, at a community level, or at a provincial level or national level. I think every single day; everywhere we go we're talking about the issues that are faced by people who are living in poverty. Seriously...if transportation isn't brought up – we talk about it, if income isn't brought up – we talk about.”

[KAP Staff Member]

Advocacy was further detailed in **Table 4**. in relation to the work of KAP in the community on issues of poverty and the need for long-term change. This included their participation in presentations, workshops and conferences, thus, ensuring community voice and

experience was brought to conversations and knowledge mobilization efforts seeking to address food insecurity through policy change.

4.4.7 The Chronosystem

At the chronosystem level, women participants spoke of their longstanding involvement with KAP programs - some spanning over 15 years. Through their relationships with the programs, women gained access to a myriad of support services and built strong social networks and relationships.

“I’ve had great years with them – 16 years I’ve dealt with them. 15 years with XXX [referring to KAP staff member] and almost 7 years with XXX [referring to another KAP staff member] – so we have done a lot together...”

[Mary]

Through the years, participants of KAP had clearly fostered strong relationships with staff and the other women involved in the programs – in many cases referring to them as their extended family.

“...I do protect all the girls in group cause they are my family, we are a family – and that’s what I was looking for. A family and being in this group – there were a big family. And as you know – we do cling on each other. I like it – it’s nice to be wanted, so I wouldn’t change anything.”

[Mary]

Even Kay (brand new to KAP programs) could foresee her involvement extending beyond the current program in which she participated in.

I: Absolutely! And do you think that beyond this program you’ll stay involved and be part of other programs with KAP?

P: I hope so! Just because, like I said being new to the community – I hardly know anyone, so this is just a good way for me to network and a way for me to meet other new moms and that kind of thing.

[Kay]

In addition, KAP further contributed to poverty and food security at the Chronosystem level through their sustained commitment to awareness, education and advocacy activities (as illustrated in **Table 4**.)

4.4.8 Reciprocity

While the findings of this thesis have been seemingly delineated into discrete levels of the ecological frame, it is important to note that these systems do not exist independent of each other. Instead, we should consider the influence and relationships within and between these systems as reciprocal, such that the ways that KAP works to address food insecurity occurs in two directions, both away from and towards to the Microsystem, or everyday experiences of their participants. In this way, we can begin to see how addressing individual level factors (such as immediate access to food) is inextricably tied to systems level change; similarly, it becomes further apparent how challenging ideological constructs can impact the ways that food insecurity is experienced by those living this reality. As one KAP staff member put it:

I hold onto to those things that I believe those core values and I really practice them and I think if we all do that...that's another way of affecting change – if we all listen and pay attention to those things that we really do know are important...like supporting families that have less – then I think that's another way – then that creates political change as well – changes the climate.

[KAP Staff Member]

4.5 Results Summary

The role of KAP in addressing food security was most prominent at the Microsystem level in terms of their “*frontline*” work with at-risk families (particularly women and their children). The formation of genuine, trusting relationships between staff and participants was the foundation of KAP’s success in terms of their outreach work, allowing them to better understand and meet the needs of the women they supported, including those related to food security and

food access. In the interview and observation process, women involved with KAP described staff members and other participants as their “extended family”, a connection that was fostered by a strong sense of shared experience and the non-judgmental atmosphere in which KAP operated. Staffs’ personal understanding of what it means to live in poverty and experience food insecurity and of the barriers faced by those using their services was clearly incorporated in the organization of KAP programming. This is of particular significance given research which suggests that in-depth understanding of the experience of food-insecurity is essential in ensuring community-based programs respond adequately to the needs of their individuals and families (Hamelin, Mercier & Bedard, 2010).

Through their programs, KAP provides material outcomes that impact food security in the short-term, by means of facilitating immediate access to healthy food for women and their families. Food was an integral piece of KAP’s outreach work; whether it was snacks and meals made available at all regular programming, or a workshop where growing, cooking and learning about food was the primary focus, there was a sense of normalcy around the presence of food. Importantly, staff members were all very conscientious of how food was presented and integrated in their programs, clearly differentiating their approach from that of the charity model – acutely focused on providing food in a way that preserves dignity, builds capacity and works towards self-sufficiency. Indeed, previous research has illustrated the negligible impact of food and financial supports garnered through participation in CPNP programs to the household food budget (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003(b)) it should be noted that KAP staff did not see the role of food in their programs as resolving the issue of hunger or food insecurity among their participants. Rather, food was impetus and entry point in which they could identify at-risk groups, and begin to build relationships and support families in a variety of ways.

Indirectly, KAP also impacted food security through staff's role as personal advocates for women participants. Primarily, KAP staff spoke of assisting participants navigate complex systems such as the Department of Community Services Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program to ensure they received all income supports in which they were eligible. By facilitating improved access to these supports, KAP staff helped families increase the money available to them for necessary household expenditures, including food. As we see, this was highly related to women's longstanding involvement with KAP – where, over time, they become connected to a web of supportive services and social networks - indicative of the interplay that occurs at the Chronosystem level.

At the Mesosystem level, KAP impacted food security by means of engaging community members and organizations in their work. By involving others, KAP staff felt they were indirectly addressing some of the barriers and stereotypes that surrounded families experiencing poverty and food insecurity, and subsequently, raising awareness and fostering investment in these issues in their community. Fostering community partnerships also contributed to the sustainability of KAP and their capacity to do community outreach; organizations would lend support in the form of donations of food and resources, volunteering of time and space, and engaging in efforts to impact long-term change. In the same way, KAP supported local organizations as much as possible in their own work, from using local food procurement and distribution companies for their daycare services, to purchasing local, in season foods for their regular programs. Through their external partnerships, KAP further impacted food security at the Mesosystem level by acting as a medium for participant engagement in various projects and related opportunities. The impact of these connections was demonstrated in KAP's involvement with the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project. Staff described how many women

involved in their programming participated in this project as ‘food costers’ and went on to participate in advocacy efforts, including speaking publically about their own experiences with poverty and food insecurity at conferences and workshops. Staff felt that by providing opportunities to become involved, KAP helped women to find their voice and build their confidence and capacity and improve their lives.

Although more centralized, there were several ways in which KAP was engaged in efforts to address food insecurity at the Exosystem and Mesosystem levels. KAP was involved in addressing food security within the Exosystem through their commitment and partnership with universities and their collaborative involvement in community-based research. KAP’s contributed in several areas of this work, including representing the voice of community by bringing forth the lived issues to research and policy conversations. They also acted as a liaison between university and community, facilitating the participation of typically marginalized populations in the research process. KAP also acted a leadership role within their community; recognized by those around them as advocates for at-risk and marginalized population groups. Furthermore, the involvement of KAP staff in provincial and national committees, community-based research projects and other food security related initiatives was identified through the interview process as significant in terms of inspiring others within and outside of the organization to get involved in this endeavor.

At the Macrosystem level, KAP worked to dispel broader assumptions and stereotypes by raising awareness of the issues faced by low-income women and the realities of their everyday lives. Much of this happens as a by-product of KAP’s work – by supporting and advocating for families, KAP’s work (supporting those facing disadvantaged situations) and issues of poverty were rendered visible in the community. Advocacy was a normal part of KAP’s outreach work,

ranging from personally advocating for the rights and dignity of women participants, to organizational and political advocacy through participation in committees, presentations and projects aimed at uncovering and addressing issues of poverty and food insecurity within Nova Scotia. Another layer of KAP's work within Macrosystem included the principles in which their agency and outreach was rooted – preserving dignity through capacity building approaches and engaging marginalized groups with a goal and purpose of long-term change. KAP was propelled by a philosophy that sought to effect change in a proactive and long-term way. An example of this, not included in these results, was KAP's work with children living in low-income circumstances – which was viewed as an attempt to 'break the cycle' of poverty and food insecurity and in an attempt to provide greater equity and opportunity for these children in comparison to their peers.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This purpose of this study was to explore how the Kids Action Program (KAP), through their food-security related work, contributes to household food security for low-income women and their families living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia. Much of the current research exploring the efficacy of community-based programs in addressing issues of food insecurity in Canada has sought to understand the reach (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013a) and material contributions of these programs for at-risk individuals and families (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b). I was interested in examining the contributions of these programs within the context of a community-based organization (KAP), and in doing so, aimed to capture their multi-level contributions in building food security, from front-line work with women experiencing these issues to their broader engagement in partnership and advocacy for policy change. In order to gain this holistic perspective, I chose to apply a case study approach, allowing the convergence of multiple streams of data in order to build a rich understanding of the scope of KAP's work and the overall role of a CAPC and CPNP-funded program in contributing to food security among low-income women and their families.

While previous research has examined the contributions of community-based food programs to food security from a community food security and food systems perspective (Carlsson, L., & Williams, P.L., 2009; McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo & Costello, 2005; Brown et al., 2005) this is the first known study to examine how these programs and their contextual environments fit within efforts to build food security using an individual/household food security lens. Participant experiences within KAP programs, as well as staff perspectives on their own role, and the role of KAP (informed by individual interviews and review of relevant

partnerships and advocacy activities), were examined in relation to their potential contributions to food security and organized using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1994). The following section will move beyond the descriptive presentation of results and situate the findings of this thesis within the current and relevant literature. This will provide a supportive basis to draw meaningful and overarching conclusions; key principles that underlie KAP's work with at-risk women and families will be presented and used to inform key recommendations for organizational practice and institutional policy that supports community-based programs to contribute to conditions of improved food security at all levels of the ecological model.

5.2 The Everyday Experience of Food Insecurity

While the case study design and small sample size do not allow the experience of food insecurity among low-income women to be fully captured, findings from this study provide important insights into the growing understanding of the real life struggles, complexities and hardships of this issue from the perspective of those who live the reality (Hamelin et al., 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003; Williams et al, 2012; Green-LaPierre, Williams, Glanville, Norris, Hunter & Watt, 2012). Women in this study faced a number of barriers, many of which had a direct impact on their ability to access enough nutritious food for themselves and their families. Given its strong association with food insecurity in the current literature (Health Canada, 2007; Health Canada, 2010; Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2014; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2003; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003a), it is of no surprise that money was most prominent in my conversations with KAP participants relative to their food access. While source of income (including wages and income assistance) and life circumstance varied, these women shared a common reality; all described the stress, worry and uncertainty that accompanied the experience

of not having enough money to cover their basic costs of living, including healthy food. As previously demonstrated among other low-income women in this province (Williams et al, 2012a), this uncertainty is further confounded by the opposing forces and conditions that actively acted against one's desire to be food secure, in this thesis, that included: household debt, high costs of living, increasing cost of food and the limitations of organizational policies that placed restrictions on access to resources and supports.

Consistent with current research (Williams et al., 2012; Calhoun, 2013), women in this study described the inextricable and compound nature of economic and physical food access when living in a rural area. As Calhoun's (2013) work suggests, transportation and geography were named as key barriers for women in accessing nutritious food. Participants of this research project talked about limited access to transportation and food markets as disallowing them to shop store to store or to seek out sale items. For at least one participant, even getting to the nearest food bank was problematic. Their limited economic and physical access meant that these women were often forced to employ coping strategies to better manage their food situations. Much like previous investigations of the experience of food insecurity among lone-mothers in Atlantic Canada (McIntyre et al, 2000; McIntyre, Officer & Robinson, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2002; Williams et al., 2012; Williams, McIntyre & Glanville, 2010), the women interviewed in this study described compromising their own health and nutrition in an attempt to protect their children from the negative effects of food insufficiency. These findings also support previous research illustrating coping mechanisms among children living in food insecure households; in one instance, a mother describes her eldest child taking a thermos of coffee to school, "*just to survive the day*". These results add to a growing body of literature documenting the nature of food management and sacrifice within the household dynamic (Glanville & McIntyre, 2006) and

the impact of food insufficiency on the health and nutrition status of adolescents (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2008). It also contributes to furthering our emerging understanding of how individuals cope with limited food access, and how economic hardships impact the food intake, management (Fram, Frongillo, Jones, Williams, Burke, DeLoach & Blake, 2011) and future health of youth.

5.2.1 Income Related Food Insecurity: A Critical Perspective:

It is well known that living in poverty can have profound consequences on many aspects of social health and well-being. Inadequate income can keep individuals from fully participating in social activities, limiting their ability to create and sustain supportive networks within their communities (Reutter et al., 2009; Stewart, Reutter, Veenstra, Love & Raphael, 2005). This type of exclusion has been described by Power (2005b) as the “otherness” felt in a consumer society when living with economic and material hardships; a situation tied closely to the experience and increasing severity of food insecurity (Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2013c). Interestingly, for women in this thesis study, exclusion was described not only in terms of economic circumstance, but also relative to their decision to stay at home to their raise children. This engendered exclusion relates to liberal feminist perspectives of market *employment* as synonymous with self-fulfillment, citizenship and women’s liberation (Power, 2005). While this perspective has long been the basis for radical feminist theory and politicized social movements (Fraser, 2012) it has served to fuel the assumption of *caring work* as an exclusively oppressive act (Devault, 1999). As indicated by the experience of women interviewed in the present study, historically constructed ideologies around the value and meaning of child-rearing vs. *paid employment* can contribute to the devaluation of women’s *caring work* within a labor market – impacting individual feelings of self-worth, exacerbating income insecurity by hindering their re-entry into the workforce and further entrenching these mother’s marginalization within their community.

One of the most notable nuances in my conversations with women around income (or lack thereof) was its governing nature, and influence over their daily lives. As evidenced by this and other research (Williams et al., 2012a), living on low-income meant constantly juggling and prioritizing monthly expenditures; too often participants were forced to make seemingly “*impossible decisions*” (Williams et al., 2010), compromising their dignity, personal preference and sometimes, health, in order to garner more food for themselves and their families. The ways in which money impede choice for women in this study, including those that relate to their basic human rights (such as food) is rooted in the premises of critical theory; fundamentally, as Brookfield (2009) discerns, these are issues caused by the actions of people in a system run for economic profit. The idea that power is etched into the daily lives of individuals and presented through their actions, attitudes and discourses is a Foucaultian perspective. In stark contrast to the idea of power as possessed by the dominant elite and operationalized from a central location *above* (Brookfield, 2009), Foucault (1982) describes power relations as omnipresent, shared and exercised in diverse forms and places across society and present in unpredictable times and ways. As he (1982) suggests, “power” is not inherent in our relationships (individual or collective), it is *neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered*, rather, power is exercised and only exists as certain actions that modify others – “an action upon an action” (pg. 171). When applied to issues of food insecurity, Foucault’s (1982) understanding of how power impacts and supports systems of inequity suggests that the focus of long-term change also be grounded in the behaviors, assumptions and actions of citizens, not solely governing bodies. This conceptualization emphasizes the necessity of working collaboratively, cross-sectorally and in a participatory way to uncover, challenge and transform individual perception and build a more compassionate and empathetic society. As we have seen elsewhere (Williams, 2014), these

processes have the potential to lead to the development of personal and collective agency, challenging the ideological and economic forces that underpin the experience of food insecurity, such as those discerned by the women who participated in this research.

5.3 The Role of CAPC and CPNP-Funded Community-based Programs in Canada

Given their roots within the publically funded health sector in Canada, attention has been drawn to the fact that community-based food programs are often restricted by institutional boundaries, which emphasize a neutrality of practice and prohibit broader engagement at the organizational level in activities that are defiant of the current social and political system (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001a; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b). The findings in this thesis also highlight institutional policies, particularly those related to KAP's core funding, as a key contributor in staff members' ability (as individuals and as an organization) to address the specific needs of their communities, successfully engage vulnerable populations in their food-related programs and services and challenge the status quo in their partnerships and advocacy work. Both the CAPC and the CPNP are founded on the principle that communities are well positioned to recognize their diverse needs and have "*the capacity to draw together the resources to address those needs.*" (PHAC, 2010d, np). From a population health perspective, this model enables organizations, such as KAP, to address health inequity through active engagement of vulnerable populations in relevant and supportive programming (PHAC, 2010d). These outcomes have been supported through evaluation literature, which shows that flexibility and autonomy is a key attribute of the CAPC and CPNP funding streams (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005) that enables individual projects to address and adapt to the diverse needs of their participants, thus supporting grass root participation in "*true community development work*" (KAP Staff).

In an examination of nearly 30 CACP/CPNP funded initiatives in the Atlantic Region, stakeholders highlight three core elements as supporting the foundation for individual change, personal and group empowerment, and community action (PHAC, 2009). Indeed these constructs - *supportive environments, participation and involvement and capacity building* (PHAC, 2009) – are fully embedded throughout the entirety of the results and outcomes of this thesis work, present in KAP’s organizational philosophies, their interactions with participants, their community and research partnerships and their commitment to understanding and addressing broader level issues. In addition to the underlying principles guiding their work, national research of CAPC and CPNP initiatives have also documented the functional capacity of these programs to engage socially and economically-disadvantaged groups in activities that deliver positive and measurable health outcomes (such as smoking cessation, increased likelihood of breastfeeding and increased breastfeeding durations, and increased vitamin/mineral supplement intake). (Muhajarine, Ng, Bowen, Cushon, Johnson, 2012). Similarly, this thesis research has highlighted the potential for KAP (a CAPC/CPNP-funded project) to contribute to food security at a *microsystem* level through enhancing nutritional, familial, social and psychological health; evidenced by women’s descriptions of their experiences with KAP’s food-related programming (i.e. KAP’s community gardening program) - particularly, the contributions of their participation in these programs during times of significant hardship. As one participant noted, *we physically lived off those boxes* [referring to KAP food box program]. *If it wasn’t for those boxes, we would have been living off Kraft dinner and fries and cheap stuff – cause that is all we could afford.*

Critically, however, Vozoris & Tarasuk’s (2003b) research raises important questions regarding the capacity of CPNP programs to address the issue of food insecurity *long-term* – highlighting the inadequacies of ad-hoc, localized programs in mobilizing the resources

necessary to change the economic circumstance of their participants. Though not explicitly, both Vozoris & Tarasuk's (2003b) and Muhajarine, Ng, Bowen, Cushon & Johnson's (2012) work illustrate some key challenges and potential gaps in current evaluations of CAPC and CPNP programs, or more broadly, strategies that utilize participatory approaches to address complex social issues (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005). This, as MacAulay and colleagues (2011) discern, is a discrepancy in distinguishing analytically between the benefits of processes (how programs are implemented and carried out) versus the benefits of participation in the programs themselves (i.e. measurable change outcomes) (MacAulay et al., 2011). In other words, the capacity of community-based approaches to address food insecurity may extend beyond their short-term material benefits at an individual or household level – i.e. the contributions of participation in KAP programs in terms of emergency food and financial support. This supports the use of an ecological approach in the framing of this thesis study as a means to complement and further our understanding of both process and material-related contributions of community-programs to food security and better explicate their role in both personal and systems level change (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005).

5.4 Community-Based Programs and Food Security

5.4.1 Introduction

Published research by leading researchers in Canada have questioned the capacity of community-based responses to food security to address the broader issues of power, race, gender and income that underpin and perpetuate unequal and limited access to food. In fact, Tarasuk (2001) and others (Hamelin, Mercier & Berdard, 2010; Power, 2012; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013), suggest that the nature of the current situation is such that agencies, like KAP, may be inadvertently contributing to the continuation and perpetuation of food insecurity by excusing

governmental and political action through the veil that hunger is being dealt with at a local level. The findings of this thesis research do not contend with other critical work in this field (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b); indeed, community-based programs, such as KAP, are not adequate or sustainable responses to end poverty or food insecurity in Canada. These findings do, however, contribute to a substantiated argument (Williams, 2014) that the momentum for this change is leveraged through a concerned and engaged society. As those working within the community and with vulnerable populations on a day-to-day basis, this case study illustrates how organizations, such as KAP, are essential partners in building a collective understanding of the oppressive and unjust political landscape (Williams, 2014 (in press)). As the findings of this thesis suggest, community-based organizations are poised to contribute to food security at both the immediate (micro) and systemic (macro) levels – through the provision of supportive programming for individuals and families and participation in advocacy activities. Collectively (though not explicitly), this work can serve to challenge the assumptions, ideologies and power dynamics that are inscribed within individuals’ everyday interactions, thus supporting the conditions for the collective action needed to achieve the goal of healthy, vibrant, food secure communities.

5.4.2 Approaches to Food Security - A Continuum of Contributions?

When considered in relation to a time frame of expected outcome, there are important and distinct similarities in the results of this thesis and what McCullum et.al. (2005) have conceptualized as short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to build food security. Re-organized along this continuum, the contributions of KAP to food security could be understood relative to their influence and fit within one of three stages - initial food systems change (i.e. KAP’s provision of food and resources to participants) - food systems in transition (i.e., KAP’s

emphasis on empowerment and capacity-building activities) - and food systems redesign for sustainability (i.e., KAP's engagement in partnerships and advocacy for policy change). While McCullum et. al.'s (2005) work provides a useful framework to explicate the strengths, limitations and anticipated outcomes of KAP's approaches and contributions to food security, it does little to link these strategies back to the "everyday experiences" of their participants and fails to acknowledge the significance of power relations, ideologies and hegemony that, as this thesis suggests, are fundamental in how this issue is experienced, understood and addressed. What's more, McCullum, et. al.'s (2005) visual and conceptual representation of these strategies suggests change is a linear, step-wise process; this over-simplification downplays the complex and reciprocal relationships that exist between individuals and their environments and assumes acceptance of, and engagement in, these named "*strategies and activities*" with little explanation of the processes needed for this to occur. Thus, while it is important to consider and recognize the parallels between McCullum, et. al.'s (2005) framework and the various levels of the ecological model used in this thesis, there are key differences in what they tell us about the processes, principles, participation and experiences that underpin these strategies and approaches and how this relates to how we address issues of food insecurity at individual and community levels.

5.4.3 The Role of Food – Participation and Equity

While the social and communal nature of preparing, sharing and consuming food is well established (Delormier, Frohlich & Potvin, 2009; O'Haraa, Helmesa, Sellena, Harpera, Bhömerb & Hovenb, 2012) few studies have looked at the ways in which food acts as a conduit for participation and equity in community programming involving vulnerable and marginalized population groups. In one of the few studies to do so, Vogel (2001) describes food sharing and

preparation in a CPNP funded community-based prenatal nutrition program, as '*leveling the playing field*' (pg. 102) between staff members and women participants. As she presents, the activity of preparing and eating food together helps to establish a common ground between typically unequal power dynamics. This '*Kitchen Table*' approach (Vogel, 2001) to programming is depicted as a method of facing food challenges with participant women, where food and nutrition are used as an entry point into population health and "*a springboard to build access, skills, confidence and social support*" (Vogel, 2001, pg. 102). The results of this thesis suggest that the role of food within KAP is consistent with Vogel's work (2001); the normalcy regarding the presence and sharing of food supported a comfortable atmosphere and a social group dynamic, enabling a greater sense of equity among staff and participants and a safe space for sharing and honest conversation.

Similar to Vogel's findings, food also acted as a means to draw typically "un-reached" populations into KAP, thus connecting these individuals to a web of supportive services. When asked about the ways that these women and their families are brought into KAP, both staff and participants identified the Great Beginnings Food Box Program as an "entry point" in terms of KAP's outreach work. Pre-and post natal women (up to 6 months) were often referred through multiple streams (including prenatal services through Nova Scotia Public Health) for receipt of this monthly subsidized, home delivered food basket¹⁰, thus enabling KAP to identify and connect with new families potentially at risk for food insecurity. It is critical to note that this situation also highlights the *power of food* in community-based programming, where individuals' desperation can leave them with little choice but to participate in activities that give them greater

¹⁰ The Great Beginnings Food Box Program provides participants with a \$15.00 subsidized, home-delivered food box that is valued at \$45-\$65 through use of external funding, matching program dollars, bulk buying, discounts and donations.

access to food. One cannot argue the existence of power in the relationship between KAP staff and participants. As Brookfield (2007) suggests, power is “already there” – it is inscribed in individuals choices, interactions and relationships. No one is outside it; there are no margins to escape it. Certainly, food provisioning can be seen as a means in which power is being exercised; there are those who hold resources and those who need access to them. However, as Brookfield further suggests “*it is a mistake to think of power in wholly negative terms*” (pg. 47); more critical is how people recognize the flow of power within their everyday lives and try to redirect it to serve the interest of many, rather than a few (Brookfield, 2007). Staff members of KAP programs acknowledge that food is often the draw for individuals to participate in their programs. Providing food is an intentional act, but not a purpose. Food serves a means to an end, a way for KAP to connect, build relationships and create networks of support in a way that builds power *with* rather than *over* these individuals (Brookfield, 2007).

While KAP’s provision of free and low-cost food could arguably be situated within the realm of charitable food provisioning, its quiet, yet intentional presence also represented an unspoken understanding among KAP staff of the struggles and barriers faced by these women participants and their families. Certainly, the findings of this thesis suggest that KAP has long recognized the issue of food insecurity among the populations they work with, as one KAP staff member stated: “*I think that we’re a little bit ahead of the game; because we work so closely with participants we kind of know what the issues are before they are named. So, food insecurity - I was aware of that before I knew that’s what it was called...*” [KAP Staff]. In fact, food was but one of many facilitating factors that enabled women’s full participation in KAP’s community-based programs; transportation, free onsite childcare, and an informal and warm approach to program delivery were all named as key features that contributed to participant

involvement and differentiated KAP (as indicated by participants) from other outreach services. The ability of KAP staff to pay close attention and respond to the contextual determinants that enable, disallow or discourage participation among the families they work with, and thus successfully engage vulnerable populations in their programs, may be in part due to the flexibility and autonomy they are granted in the use of their core funding.

Though not studied in this thesis research, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) have previously demonstrated exceedingly low rates of participation in community food programs among predominantly food insecure households in Toronto, a phenomenon which Loopstra and Tarasuk (2013a) suggest is based largely on their accessibility (knowledge of how or where to participate or whether programs were located in their neighborhood) and fit (whether programs reflected participants needs) within an urban setting. Certainly, this research raises serious concerns regarding the efficacy of community food programs, thus challenging the perception of these initiatives as successful and/or sustainable solutions to issues of food insecurity. It should be noted, however, that these studies lack the comparative analysis needed to further explicate individual participation as it relates to the parameters, directives and philosophies in which these programs operate and engage in outreach work. What's more, these study designs do not allow for exploration of the differential nature of physical (Carter, Dubois & Tremblay, 2014) and social environments or the individualized community-based support that has been demonstrated when comparing urban versus rural settings (Calhoun, 2013). As the findings of my thesis indicate, the ways in which institutional policies (such as the flexibility of CAPC and CPNP as core funding programs) interact with community-based programs in a rural environment has important implications in their assessment and evaluation. As such, more research is needed to isolate the reasons for low rates of participation illustrated in Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) and

Loopstra & Tarasuk's (2013a) work, including inaccessibility and lack of fit (for example, as attributes of poor program design, limited resources, or lack of autonomy within the organization to meet the specific needs identified within the community) before these findings can be generalized as inadequacies of this type of outreach work.

It should also be noted that while staff and participants perceived the common thread of food within KAP as a distinct feature and strength of their programming and outreach work, other researchers present the normative provisioning of food and supports as characteristics of the 'dragnet' function of food-centered initiatives (McIntyre, Travers & Dayle, 1999). As McIntyre, Travers & Dayle (1999) define, "dragnets" as "*the deliberate hunting and gathering of clients*" (pg, 199), whereby institutions hold increased control over the lives of individuals by means of creating sustained reliance on program's services, thus pushing them into a permanent state of need (McIntyre, Travers & Dayle, 1999). This means that through their provision of food and resources, KAP may be inadvertently drawing individuals and families into a cycle of dependency. Interestingly, KAP staff members seemed to openly acknowledge and challenge this perspective throughout the interview process. As one staff contested, "*you cannot become independent if you've never experienced dependency*" (KAP Staff Member) - an opinion based on the understanding of the instability that shapes the lives of their participants; where depending on someone or something is essential in building the self-confidence needed to reach their full potential. The idea of dependency as a stepping stone in self-sufficiency, rather than a reproduction of inequity, remains relatively unexplored in current literature chronicling the experience and solutions to food insecurity (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005), illustrating a potential gap in our understanding of this phenomenon.

5.4.4 Relationships, Individual Empowerment and Personal Agency

Indeed, through my conversations with KAP participants (via interviews and participant observation) I have come to recognize the significant role of food provisioning in connecting vulnerable populations to community programs and support systems. More critically, however, is my realization of how this differs from *engagement and participation* in these programs.

Although food is present in both cases, the latter is contingent on the attentiveness and commitment of the organization and staff members to building caring, trusting relationships. Certainly, the women I spoke with were quick to differentiate KAP's ways of working with participants from their experiences with other community outreach groups; comparisons were based on participants' perception of the authenticity of other's (staff and participants) concerns, caring and investment in the outcomes of their families' lives. Interestingly, while KAP staff members also differentiate their relationships with participants compared with those formed between staff and participants of other community programs, they do so with hesitancy. My conversations with staff uncovered an existing tension and potential barrier in meaningful community work – the idea that emotional investment is an “unprofessional” practice within the bound setting of the workplace. This dichotomy of *professionalism* has sparked recent debate in field research, suggesting it extends beyond the parameters of the results presented here and includes, in the least, the realm of medicine (Coulehan, 2005), education (Yan, Evansa & Harveya, 2011) and social work (Ingram, 2012).

Coulehan (2005) describes the tendency to be hostile towards altruism, compassion, integrity, fidelity, self-effacement, and other traditional qualities as part of the evolution of professionalism to be increasingly quantifiable and evidence-based (Coulehan, 2005). In his central criticism of what he calls the “professionalism movement”, Coulehan (2005) questions

whether skills and practices have become surrogates for virtue and relationships in medical practice. This, as Ingram (2013), O'Connor's (2008) and others (Yana, Evansa & Harveya, 2011) suggest, is part of a larger discourse in the literature around the presence, use, suppression and/or removal of emotions in rational decision making as it relates to the identity and power of the professional (Ingram, 2012). Ingram (2013), however, also argues that "*emotional attunement and empathy are the foundations of establishing an open and trusting relationship...[and] to separate emotions from practice is essentially separating the relationship with the service user from the practice*" (pg, 6). For him, emotions are inextricably related to authentic interactions and essential in the development of relationships between clients and service providers. This contention is aligned with the results of this thesis, where emotional investment and reciprocal caring were essential in KAP's ability to understand and meet the needs of participants they work with, thus helping them to overcome the barriers in their lives. As one KAP staff member put it, "*it's real. They know that I care and I do. And I believe they care about me as well. And that's a good foundation to work from in terms of understanding their needs and for them to ask things from me that they might not be able to ask of people in other institutions.*"

For women in this thesis, building meaningful and trusting relationships with staff and other participants lessened their feelings of isolation and lead to their ease, comfort and confidence to engage in group conversation and in some cases (through KAP's external partnerships) share their experiences with others for the purpose of community awareness, research and policy change. Kid's Action Program staff saw this as a type of personal growth, whereby these women come to *find their voice* and become more involved - as mothers, as citizens within their communities and as individuals who have firsthand experience with food insecurity. This type of transformation has been previously documented by Williams (2014)

within the realm of participatory engagement; whereby women experiencing food insecurity are involved in processes that enable them to identify, understand, and challenge the structural forces in their lives that lead to their disempowerment and powerlessness. It can also be understood as part of what Friere (as cited in Brookfield, 2007) describes as emergence of “critical consciousness”, a dialogical process by which these women start to challenge the negative images of themselves that have been created and propagated by dominant (and oppressive) ideology.

Importantly, Brookfield (2009) identifies the sense of possessing power – the belief that one has energy, intelligence, resources, and opportunity - as a precondition to intentional social change. This means that in order to move forward collective action, *individuals* must first feel empowered to participate and act. As an isomorphic term, empowerment retains the same basic meaning across different levels of analysis (Maynard, Gilson & Mathieu, 2012). For individuals, however, it represents *feelings of competency, a sense of control, a capacity for efficacy* (Speer, Peterson, Armstead & Allen, 2013) *and an increased ability to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes* (Wallerstein, 2006) thus, challenging the perceived or real powerlessness that stems from inequity (Wallerstein, 1992; Williams, 2014). Though still highly debated and criticized within the literature, there is sufficient support to suggest that empowerment approaches are beneficial to individuals, teams, and organizations, and can lead to positive psychological, organizational, and community/political outcomes (Wallerstein, 2006). In the context of the results presented in this thesis, individual empowerment was fostered through KAP’s personal and organizational commitment to providing services that reduced the effects of poverty in a way that preserves dignity, respects choice and autonomy and seeks to build capacity, self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Through

participation in KAP programs, participants were provided with the support, tools and opportunity to have their voice heard; the ‘*confidence to question*’ (KAP Staff) the socio-economic environment which has shaped their lives and experiences. Williams (2014) identifies this process as the development of personal agency, and within Gramsci’s theory of change, suggests it is a fundamental step in revealing the institutional and systemic forces that constrain women and their families and in challenging the internalized hegemonic values that are embedded within (and contribute to) historically constructed ideologies around poverty and food insecurity.

5.4.5 Leadership, Partnerships and Advocacy

While strong organizational commitment to individual empowerment is commendable, simply engaging in discourse that promotes social justice and community participation does not replace the need for strategic social policy that enables the achievement of food security. As Wallerstein (2006) indicates, “*empowerment is a dynamic interplay between gaining internal skills and overcoming external structural barriers to accessing resources*”; the success of empowerment initiatives is therefore dependent on the agency of the people involved, and its integration within a comprehensive strategy that strives to build greater equity (Wallerstein, 2006). Herein lies the essence for sharp critique of community-based responses to food security (Tarasuk, 2001) – in which their basic presence is an inherent acceptance of the structural origin of poverty and food insecurity as a *given*. Under this assumption, intervention often centers on helping individuals’ better cope with their situations rather than questioning and challenging the broader systems in which their lives are governed.

The findings of this thesis lie in agreement with the critiques that question the adequacy of community-based responses (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001a; Vozoris & Tarasuk,

2003b) and further draw to question the capacity of any *singular* program or sector to create the conditions for improved food security in Canada. Though their ‘on the ground work’ may not result in the direct and sustained exchange of resources needed to achieve food security for their participants long-term (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001a; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b), the participation of KAP staff members in activities (**See Table 4**) that strive to address and raise awareness of the issues and dimensions of poverty and food insecurity has earned them recognition within their community as agents of change and advocates for marginalized population groups. As one KAP staff member put it, “...*people know who we are, they know they see us coming, who we are and what we’re representing. And it’s, often times, it’s when things are not right, when there’s an injustice, and we’re in there, you know, to straighten out a few people – not in that way, but just like ‘in case you weren’t aware’...*”.

Though far from a linear process, Gibbon, Labonte and Lavarack (2002) have tied the principles of *leadership* to theories of social change (or Macrosystems processes) as key domains in community capacity building. As Labonte (2003) suggests, leaders are critical in enabling community members to *mobilize internal or access external resources, speak their voice with authority, or otherwise influence health-determining policy debates and decisions* (pg, 30). Individual and organizational leadership within KAP is furthered through their diverse and sustained community and research partnerships (**See Table 3**). These partnerships span the domains of health, education and community and lie in congruency with the core principles and strategic goals of community-based programs funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada¹¹ (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). In fact, national evaluations of CAPC and

¹¹ Community capacity building relies on the forging and maintenance of strong partnerships and collaboration. This knowledge is one of the key tenets of CAPC and other PHAC community-based programs (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010).

CPNP (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005; PHAC, 2010) suggest that virtually all programs have well established local partnerships and that these ties play a critical role in leveraging *resources, expertise, ideas and perspectives*, and contributing to organizational and community capacity to take action – a key element in achieving change.

Certainly, my research highlights the work of an organization that understands and acknowledges food insecurity as a significant health concern that is experienced most acutely, but not fully resolved, at a local level. The KAP staff members I spoke to acknowledge the socially constructed differences in power, resources and opportunity that underpin the day-to-day experiences of their participants and seek to address these inequities through individual participation in education, awareness and advocacy and via their organizational involvement in community partnership and leadership. Much like the compound layers of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1994) used in the organization of this thesis, building food security requires consideration, collaboration and critique across the Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, Macro and Chrono-systems of our social fabric. This multi-tiered approach is essential in building shared ownership over the “responsibility” of and solutions to food insecurity, recognizing the individual nature (Microsystem) in which power is exercised, and how over time, inequity (Macrosystem) is constructed. Community-based organizations, such as KAP, play a critical role in addressing food insecurity beyond a food-provisioning focus. As demonstrated in my results and discussion sections, when “on the ground” work happens in tandem with community and research partnerships it allows not only for shared knowledge and the integration of individual and community experience in academia and policy development but also builds the community support that is necessary to enable these changes to materialize and be sustained long-term. In this way, community-based organizations, such as KAP, can play a key

role in building momentum to address these issues through enabling and empowering the individuals they work with and their community to begin to imagine their world differently, a key premise of *critical consciousness* and the foundation to creating a cultural shift where change is seen as necessary and conceivable (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to better understand how KAP, through their food security related work, contributes to household food security for low-income women and their families. This included exploring the *everyday experiences* of these women as they relate to household food security and their involvement with KAP programs. Because much of the current literature reflects the critique of community food programs outside of their organizational context (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b, Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013), this study also aimed to provide a broader understanding of how these programs and experiences are embedded within a complex system; where organizational involvement, partnership and principles are all considered in terms of the contributions of a community-based organization to food security for these women and their families. The women I spoke with described KAP as unique in comparisons to other outreach services that they had been involved with – as such, the conclusions presented here should not be considered as “*standard practice*” across all agencies of a similar jurisdiction and mandate. As a case study, this thesis paints a picture of a bound setting, of a particular place and time; while these results cannot be generalized, they do substantiate previous evaluations (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005; Muhajarine, Ng, Bowen, Cushon, Johnson, 2012; Vogel, 2001), which suggest that federally-funded community programs share common characteristics and guiding principles that underpin the success of their work with vulnerable population groups. They further inform the basis for recommendations in regards to the ways that community-based organizations may be involved in efforts to build food security for participants of their programs and others in their communities.

The findings of this thesis correspond with previous research in Atlantic Canada (McIntyre et al., 2003) and Nova Scotia (Williams et al., 2012; Green-LaPierre, Williams, Glanville, Norris, Hunter & Watt, 2012; Williams et al., 2010), which documents the experience of food insecurity for women and their families. This includes, the constant struggle to get nutritious food for themselves and their families, compromising diet quality for increased quantity, physical barriers to food access in a rural community and the implications of stress and judgment (Williams et al., 2012) as ever present in their day to day interactions. Much like previous research (Power, 2005) indicates, participants in this thesis viewed increased income as the primary means to overcome their circumstance and attain a better standard of living, one where they were privy to greater control over their lives and food situation. This perception is substantiated findings exploring the adequacy of minimum wage in Nova Scotia between 2002 to 2010 and 2012, respectively (Newell, Williams & Watt, 2014), which support income- related policy directives as a primary route to achieving food security long-term. From this perspective, criticisms of community-based programs in terms of their capacity to improve individual's or family's food security (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001b; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003b) are certainly justified; indeed, there is very little that locally bound organizations, such as KAP, can do to significantly alter the present and future financial security of their participants – as these are issues deeply embedded in our social and economic systems.

However, as the definition indicates, household food insecurity is a complex issue, and while income certainly dictates food access in Canada, it does not guarantee equity nor does it change the socially embedded ideologies, norms and hegemony (Brookfield, 2007) that serve to marginalize individuals within their own communities and social circles. I align myself with other researchers (Bullock, Williams & Limbert, 2003) who propose that an individualistic

culture will always promote unequal power dynamics, including those that manifest as limited access to resources. From this perspective, improving food access through income equality is dependent on the attributions and beliefs of a collectivist society, where poverty is viewed as a structural problem, income inequality as unfair, and wealth as unearned (Bullock, Williams & Limbert, 2003). In this sense, the philosophies that guide community-based programs and the extent to which they foster authentic relationships with their participants and build strong partnerships within their community holds greater significance than their tangible and measurable outcomes relative to food and money – it is a step away from the pursuit of individual gain and towards the compassion, caring and collective well-being that underlies the meaning of “community”.

6.2 Research Objective (1)

To explore the ‘everyday experiences’ of low-income women living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia in relation to their involvement in KAP’s food security related programs, KAP, and household food security.

6.2.1 Conclusion

The “everyday experience” of food insecurity for women living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia includes the struggle to get enough nutritious foods (rooted in economic and physical barriers to food access) for themselves and their families. It also encompasses management of household food resources, in which mothers were likely to make personal sacrifices to their nutrition and health so their children could have more. This experience is exacerbated by the cost of living, including healthy food and health care and organizational policies that inhibit access to supportive services among these women. The lives and experience of these women are further shaped by a social environment where they are subject to

assumptions, judgments self-blame and stigmatization related to poverty, food insecurity and their role as mothers.

6.3 Research Objective (2)

To explicate the levels in which the KAP is engaged in efforts that address the broader inequities and dominant ideologies that underpin and maintain issues of household food insecurity throughout Nova Scotia.

6.3.1 Conclusion

The KAP contributes to efforts to address food security at all levels of the social ecological model. This includes programs that facilitate greater access to resources (including food) and that foster social support and mutual sharing, and enabling women to “find their voice” as mothers, community members and individuals with firsthand experience of food insecurity. Through their participation in education and awareness activities and their leadership as advocates for marginalized population groups, KAP contributes to raising awareness on issues of poverty and food insecurity within their community, helping to address the underlying perceptions, judgments and assumptions that impact the lives of their participants. At the same time, KAP engages in community and research partnerships and provincial networks that strive to address food insecurity long-term through social and policy change.

6.4 Research Objective (3)

To use lessons learned to create an understanding of the potential for community-based agencies and the programs they implement to contribute to household food security in Nova Scotia, and apply these learnings to the development of recommendations for community-based programs across Canada.

The following conclusions relate to key findings derived from this thesis research (and further supported through the literature) related to the activities, actions, processes and principles

that underlie KAP's work with vulnerable population groups and are essential in their ability to address issues of food security. Each conclusion is followed by a key recommendation relative to how other community-based programs across Canada may become more involved in efforts to contribute to build food security long-term.

6.4.1 Conclusion

Kids Action Program's "ways of working" are grounded in principles of social justice with strong organizational leadership that supports engagement in partnership and advocacy for long-term change. This is complemented by the autonomy, flexibility and directives of their core (federal) funding agency (CAPC/CPNP), which further enables KAP to address real community needs and engage vulnerable population groups in supportive and relevant programming.

Kids Action Program functions under a particular set of values, philosophies and approaches; with programs and services that reflect the needs of their community, and that focus on empowerment, dignity, capacity building and social justice. The principles within which KAP operates are further supported through the complimentary institutional directives of their core funding agency (CACP/CPNP), which promote equity and accessibility, community-based decision making, partnership and an autonomy and flexibility in the use allotted monies. In fact, in all of my conversations with staff members, this flexibility was identified as critical in enabling KAP to tailor their programs to better address the issues and barriers faced by participants (including food insecurity) and engage in true community development work. As one staff member put it, *I can just do my work and meet people's needs, **the needs that they really need met** and not according to some program plan but just, we have a lot of autonomy, so I really appreciate that.*

Essentially, in order to be effective, including addressing issues of food insecurity, community-based organizations need programs that are participant driven, not predetermined. There was a general sense that this flexibility and autonomy also provides organizations with more freedom in terms of speaking out as advocates for both participants and the broader issues within their community.

6.2.1.1. Recommendation.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this thesis as well as other evaluations of CAPC and CPNP programs (Williams, Langille & Stokvis, 2005; Muhajarine, Ng, Bowen, Cushon, Johnson, 2012; Vogel, 2001), which suggest that community-based organizations need strong organizational leadership and institutional directives that support principles of social justice and recognize the unique issues each community faces that impede individual access to food and resources.

- Funding agencies that seek to support food security should allow organizational autonomy and flexibility in the use of grant and core monies to allow programming that is grounded in real community needs.
- Community-based programs seeking to engage and support at-risk population groups should assess and address the barriers that impede access and participation in these services. This includes transportation, onsite child-care and the provision of healthy meals/snacks.
- To contribute to food security long-term, community-based programs need strong leadership and institutional directives that support staff and organizational participation in activities, partnerships and advocacy for policy change.

6.4.2 Conclusion

Authentic, reciprocal relationships are fundamental in the engagement and participation of vulnerable populations in community-based programs. They are further essential in enabling

staff members to understand the needs of their participants and address the barriers they face through supportive and relevant programs and services.

As these findings indicate, KAP staff members describe an investment in the lives of participants that extended beyond their *role* with the organization. The apologetic and hesitant nature in which KAP staff members describe their relationships with participants suggests they were of the assumption that others outside of their organization would perceive this type of emotional connection as “unprofessional”. Kids Action Program participants, however, were quick to identify the genuine nature of their relationships with staff as a unique feature and a key factor in their initial and continued participation with the organization. Often, KAP staff would use their own life experiences as a platform for discussion and sharing in group programming; a critical element in building trusting and open relationships between typically unequal power groups. This approach not only supported greater equity among staff and participants in a group setting, it was what differentiated KAP from other organizations – participants felt like staff understood their experiences and really cared for them as individuals.

6.2.2.1. Recommendation. The following recommendations are made in order to challenge the perception that emotions should remain separated from professionalism in community-based work. Research examining the dynamics of individuals’ relationships to services and service providers suggest that clients desire therapeutic relationships with their health-care providers. In other words, when *participants perceive that a health-care provider relates to them, they feel connected to and understood by the provider* (Shattel, Starr & Thomas, 2007). For KAP, compassion, authenticity and mutual sharing between staff and participants was pivotal in attracting and sustaining participation and building trusting relationships with at-risk groups.

- Community-based programs that seek to engage at-risk populations groups must invest time and energy into building trusting relationships and understand this process as a pre-requisite to participation.
- Staff members that work within community-based programs should be encouraged to share personal stories and individual experiences as a means of connecting with participants and building more authentic, equitable and trusting relationships.

6.4.3 Conclusion

Food plays an integral role in addressing food security within community-based programs, as an “entry point” for at-risk population groups to connect with supportive programming and as a means to create a more equitable and social atmosphere between staff and participants.

Consistent with previous research of CAPC/CPNP programs (Vogel, 2001) these findings suggest that food can play an integral role in community-based programming - utilized in outreach work as an entry point to connect with women at risk of food insecurity and through shared preparation and consumption, a leveler among staff and participants, thus priming a comfortable and social atmosphere that facilitates sharing and open conversation. At the same time, the presence of food provisioning within community-based programs also holds the potential to distract from the underlying and root causes of food insecurity and to compromise dignity and autonomy among participants, thus laying the ground work for initiating and maintaining participation among vulnerable population groups. This means that community-based approaches need to carefully consider the role that food plays in their programming to ensure they support, rather than deter, participation and efforts to build food security.

6.2.3.1. Recommendation. The following recommendations recognize the vicarious role of food in community-based programs, particularly those seeking to engage individuals and families potentially at risk for food insecurity.

- The integration of food within community-based programs should be done in a way that preserves dignity and respects the needs of participants.
- Community-based organizations should involve staff and participants in the preparation and sharing of food within programs to prime a more equitable and social atmosphere.
- Community-based programs should use food provisioning as a means to engage and sustain participation among vulnerable populations in supportive programming.
- To address food security, the provision of food in community-based programs must be part of broader strategic purpose. One that seeks to build capacity and provide individuals with the supports, tools and resources they need to overcome the various barriers that impede their access to healthy food.

6.4.4 Conclusion

Partnerships create the conditions for shared ownership over the “responsibility” of addressing issues of household food insecurity, while working cross-sectorally enables knowledge sharing for grassroots and systemic change.

These findings point to the need for collaboration and partnership as precursors to building improved understanding and sparking critical conversations about food insecurity and its solutions in this province. Working across sectors supports a multi-tiered approach, whereby immediate access to supports and resources (including food) happens in tandem with strategic planning and advocacy for policy change. Community-based agencies that work with vulnerable populations should strive to become more involved in initiatives that seek systemic change, while academia and governmental bodies should also be seeking to garner the expertise that comes from community involvement. This middle ground promotes a shared responsibility of the

issue of food insecurity across multiple groups and emphasizes the significance of different forms of knowledge in creating the conditions for healthy, vibrant, food secure communities.

6.2.4.1. Recommendation. The following recommendations recognize the significance of collaboration and partnerships in building community capacity (Labonte & Lavarack, 2003) and addressing complex social issues, such as food insecurity (Williams, 2014; Johnson, Williams & Gillis, In Press; Williams et al., 2012c). Partnerships enable sharing of ideas, resources and perspectives and promote working collectively for advocacy and social change.

- Community-based organizations working with vulnerable populations groups should actively seek out local partnerships as a means of leveraging support and resources that have a direct impact on the lives of the participants they work with.
- Community-based organizations seeking to address food insecurity long-term should seek strategic partnership that enables integration of community voice in research and policy development.

6.5 Personal Reflection

As I reflect on my personal experiences in conducting and carrying out this research project, I am overwhelmed by the kindness and acceptance of KAP (staff and participants); inviting me into their programs and lives. Throughout the entirety of this project, I have struggled with the framing of my findings; constantly trying to strike the balance of being a ‘critical’ researcher while remaining true to words and descriptions of my participants. In this process, I have constantly questioned how my own convictions and personal values are present in my writing and the organization of this thesis, highlighting for me the complex interplay between the researcher and the research – *has my own thinking about these issues influenced how the results of this research are presented or have the results of this research influenced how I think about these issues?* With the support of my thesis supervisors, I endeavored to remain reflexive as a researcher, acknowledging the difficult nature of objectivity in qualitative analysis

and thus, how my own assumptions and subjectivity may be present in my approaches. In the end, my hope is that my work has provided a medium for voices that are typically unheard and that my thesis holds true to the experiences of the women that shared their stories with me.

Over the past three years, I have faced numerous obstacles, both personally and in the implementation of my research. Indeed, I have come to understand the necessity of relationships in both community and research settings. My struggle to successfully recruit participants through passive approaches (i.e. posters/flyers) highlights my own lack of understanding at this time of the factors that enable and support engagement and participation. I now see how taking the time to establish rapport and build relationships with participants may be perceived as a greater commitment to these individuals and the issues they faced, rather than simply the research process. Recruitment was further challenged by the sheer nature of the lives of those living in at-risk situations. Three additional interviews that I had scheduled were cancelled on the basis of medical emergencies; I attempted to reschedule these interviews, with little avail. Indeed, I can appreciate how participation in a student interview is not the priority in the stress of day-to-day activities among these families.

Personally, I have, and continue to grapple with the guilt of my own privilege and position. This was particularly evident for me during an informal conversation with a KAP participant. As we spoke, she shared some of her personal struggles with poverty, driven by an unexpected teenage pregnancy and an unstable and unsupportive upbringing. Based on both her life experiences and what I can only assume is the visible wear of living in a state of constant stress, I presumed that this woman was in her early to mid-forties. I can remember the shock I felt when realizing that she was in fact 25; exactly my age at the time. I wondered - how could our lives come to be so different? This was an altering experience for me – it made me not only

question the conditions that give rise to food insecurity, but also the ways in which social norms and expectations have influenced the motivation behind my own goals and aspirations. Is striving for personal and professional “*success*” merely a selfish endeavor? If not, than how does one use their *power* within society to challenge the very inequity has enabled them, over others, to succeed? While I have yet to find the answers to these all of these questions, this thesis experience has ensued in me a commitment to continue to challenge the status quo and question unequal power dynamics, including those in which I serve to benefit. Certainly, undergoing this research has contributed to my own personal growth and has made me a more compassionate, empathetic and driven individual – values I will carry with me in all aspects of my life.

6.6 Implications for Future Research

The results of the current study highlight some key areas for future research to better understanding the role of community-based organizations in building food security in Nova Scotia and elsewhere. This section offers insight and suggestions of ways to build upon the findings presented here to further explore the differences between community programs, provide insight into promising practices to better support the needs of those living with food insecurity, and address the conditions in which these experiences manifest and persist.

6.6.1 The experience of food insecurity

The results of this thesis add to a growing body of literature, exploring the implications, risks and characteristics of food insecurity in Canada. While our knowledge of this issue has undoubtedly evolved in the past decade, more research is needed to better understand how poverty and food insecurity interact, and are experienced at a national, provincial and local level. This is especially the case for individuals and families living in rural and isolated communities, (who are underrepresented in the current peer-reviewed literature in this area) as well as those

living Nova Scotia (where rates of food insecurity are among the highest in the country), both who may face unique barriers that impede their access to enough nutritious food.

6.6.2 Community-based programs and food security

This thesis adds to a small body of literature that explores and critically assesses community-based approaches to individual and household food security in Canada. There is a significant need for further research that explores how food insecurity is addressed at a local level, even more so, research that seeks to describe the influence (both positive and negative) these activities may have on broader social and policy change. As the results of this thesis suggest, assessing the contributions of community-based programs should include consideration of both the shorter-term, more material benefits of participation in community-based programs as well as the process-oriented outcomes that relate to how programs are implemented and carried out (MacAulay et al., 2011). The findings of this thesis illustrate the need for research that applies ecologically-framed evaluations and assessments of these programs to better explicate their role in both personal and systems level change.

6.6.3 Cross comparisons of community-based programs

The findings presented in this study illustrate the organizational principles, outcomes and experiences of one community-based program serving participants and their families in the Annapolis Valley region of Nova Scotia. This organization has unique characteristics and governance that may or may not be reflective of other programs of a similar mandate. To better understand the ways in which community-based programs complement or contradict efforts to build food security, comparative analyses are needed to identify, understand and isolate covariates that may influence the outcomes of evaluations of these programs. Specifically, I suggest the application of a mixed-method, multi-case study approach to enable greater

understanding of both the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of these programs, including their contributions to efforts to address food security. Examples of specific variables to be investigated in further research on community-based programs, includes:

6.6.3.1 Funding and Institutional Policies

The institutional policies and parameters that underlie KAP's core funding (CAPC/CPNP) were clearly identified in this study as a critical impetus relative to their "success" as a community-based support. The flexibility and autonomy granted through these federal initiatives enabled KAP to tailor and adapt their programs, facilitate participation among their participants, and engage in advocacy activities through external community and research partnerships. What remains unclear; however, is how these governing directives differ across organizations of a similar mandate, and to what extent, if any, they influence the capacity of these programs to address the needs of their participants across an ecological model of understanding. There is also very little understanding of the complex ways in which these policies serve to shape the guiding principles of community-based programs, including the commitment of staff members to fostering meaningful relationships and authentic interactions with their participants. As such, the findings here suggest the need for further research to better explicate the association between institutional policies (such as CAPC/CPNP funding parameters) and the varied levels of outcomes and evaluations of community-based programs.

6.6.3.2 Rural vs. Urban Settings

Coulhan (2013) has demonstrated the unique experiences of individuals living in urban and rural food insecure households, suggesting that place of residence does have an important role in the manifestation and management of household food insecurity. The findings here

suggest the need for further investigations into the factors unique to community-based programs in rural versus urban settings. In particular, more research is needed to identify how the environments in which these programs are embedded impact their capacity to address issues of food insecurity among vulnerable groups.

6.6.3.3 Values, experiences and perceptions

When comparing households living this experience with community stakeholders (i.e., community workers, program managers and representatives from donor agencies), Hamelin et al. (2010) have highlighted important discrepancies in their perceptions of the risk factors and characteristics of food security and the relative effectiveness of community programming to meet their needs. As such, the personal experiences and values that KAP staff members describe in relation to poverty and food insecurity may have implications in terms of how their programs fit household needs (and realities of their experiences) and reflect needed policy change. More research is needed to better understand how the perceptions, experiences and values of community stakeholders (specifically, program staff) influence organizational approaches, philosophies, program development and most importantly, the participation and engagement of at-risk population groups.

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APPENDIX A – Recruitment Poster

How Does the Kids Action Program Impact Women's Access to Nutritious Food?

Sarah Lake, a Master's student at Mount Saint Vincent University, is looking to interview adult women (over 18) who:

- ✓ Have been, or are involved with the Kids Action Program as a participant

Sarah wants to know about your experiences with the Kids Action Program, including how being involved has impacted how easy or difficult it is to get enough of the healthy foods you need for you and your family. During the interview, she would like to hear your thoughts and opinions on topics such as:

- Your time with the Kids Action Program - what has kept you involved?
- What are your experiences in providing your family with enough healthy foods?
- Do you have suggestions on how the Kids Action Program could improve their programs?



Interviews can take place over the phone or in person at a location of your choice (i.e. at your home or in a public space) and will take between 1 – 2 hours.

For more details please contact:

Sarah Lake: (902) 457-5408 (*personal email), leave a message with Apple Tree Landing Children's Centre (902) 582-1375 or contact a staff member.

You will receive a gift card as a thank-you for your time.

APPENDIX B – Recruitment Packages



Excellence • Innovation • Discovery

Letter of Information
Participants of the Kids Action Program

Hello,

My name is Sarah Lake. I am a Masters student in the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my Master's thesis, I will be conducting research exploring the role that the Kids Action Program plays in addressing food security under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Patty Williams and Dr. Deborah Norris.

Purpose of the Study

I would like to invite you to take part in my study '*Growing Food Security in Nova Scotia from the Ground up: a Case Study of the Kids Action Program*'. The purpose of this study will be to explore how the Kids Action Program (KAP), through their food security related work, contributes to household food security for women living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia.

How is the Study Conducted?

I would like to talk to you in a 60-90 minute interview about your experiences with KAP's food security-related programs and the KAP as an agency. This interview may be conducted in the privacy of your own home, or in an alternative location of your choice. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and notes will be taken throughout. After the interview has been conducted and transcribed, you will be contacted for a chance to review your responses in the form of a summary report.

Potential Harms and Benefits

By taking part in this study, you are providing information that will add to our understanding of the ways in which food insecurity is being addressed in Nova Scotia. Although no benefits can be guaranteed, this information may be used in the future to improve KAP programming, as well

as to provide recommendations for other programs aimed at addressing food insecurity throughout Nova Scotia and Canada.

In some cases, discussion of your experiences with food insecurity may cause you some emotional distress. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, or disallow inclusion of your responses in the final report. Furthermore, your participation in this project is completely voluntary and at anytime, you may choose to withdraw from this study without question or penalty; any information you have provided will be destroyed accordingly.

Due to the nature of relations among KAP participants and staff members, there is the potential that information you share during your interview may make others aware of your participation in this study, thus connecting you to your responses. To minimize these risks, all measures will be taken to ensure your anonymity and all staff members and the executive director of the KAP have been made aware of the purpose of this study.

Compensation

As a small token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a gift/fruit-basket.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality is extremely important. All responses you provide will be included in written reports under a numerical code or fictitious name. Your name will only be kept to contact you after your interview has been transcribed to review your responses, after which all identifying information will be removed from the data you have provided. Your interview will be recorded then transcribed. Electronic data will be kept under password protection and transcribed data will be kept locked in a secure location at the Participatory and Action Research and Training Center on Food Security at Mount Saint Vincent University. Only my supervisors and I (the student researcher) will have access to these data.

In accordance to the Mount Saint Vincent Research Ethics Board, in the case that an audit of the research must be conducted, all data, including transcripts and audiotapes of the interviews will be kept in a secure location for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. After this period, all data will be destroyed accordingly.

Questions, Comments or Concerns

If you have any questions, please contact the student researcher, Sarah Lake (*personal email) or (902) 457-5408) or faculty supervisors Dr. Patty Williams (patty.williams@msvu.ca) or Dr. Deborah Norris (deborah.norris@MSVU.ca)

If you have difficulties with, or concerns about any aspect of this research study, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in this study, you may contact the Mount Saint Vincent's University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sarah Lake

Consent Form

I, _____ (*please print first and last name*) have read the information provided in the ***Letter of Information*** and agree to participate in this study.

I understand that:

- 1) This study will be carried out by Sarah Lake, a master's student at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) and that I will be asked questions about my involvement with the Kids Action Program (KAP) and my experiences with getting enough nutritious food and involvement in food-related programs.
- 2) My participation in this study is voluntary and I may leave at any time or decline to answer any question without penalty. Following my withdrawal, any data I have provided will be destroyed immediately.
- 3) That a possible risk of participation in this study is talking about embarrassing or sensitive experiences related to my ability to get the foods I need or want.
- 4) All of my responses will be kept confidential, stored securely, and destroyed five years after the completion of this study, and that my name will not be associated with my responses in any manner.
- 5) Only Sarah Lake and her Supervisors (Dr Patty Williams and Dr Deborah Norris) will have access to original data.
- 6) If I have any concerns or questions with this study I may address them to Sarah, her supervisors, or a MSVU representative.
- 7) While it is hoped that this information will be used to improve programs within the KAP and other agencies across Canada, there is no guarantee that this will happen.
- 8) This interview will be audiotaped and that I may also choose, at any time, to participate without audio recording.

Date _____

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Student Investigator _____

Please indicate whether you would like to review a summary of your transcript:

Yes No

Best way to contact you to review your transcript:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Other: _____

Would you like a summary of the final results?

Yes No

Address (if you would like a mailed copy)

Email (if you would like an electronic copy): _____

Other: _____



Excellence • Innovation • Discovery

**Letter of Information:
Key Community Liaisons & Project Staff**

Hello,

My name is Sarah Lake. I am a Masters student in the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my Master's thesis, I will be conducting research exploring the Kids Action Program's role in food security work under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Patty Williams and Dr. Deborah Norris.

Purpose of the Study

I would like to invite you to take part in my study '*Growing Food Security in Nova Scotia from the Ground up: a Case Study of the Kids Action Program*'. The purpose of this study will be to explore how the Kids Action Program (KAP), through their food security related work, contributes to household food security for women living in the Annapolis Valley Region of Nova Scotia.

How is the Study Conducted?

I would like to talk to you in a 60-90 minute interview about your experiences and knowledge of KAP's programs, the KAP as an agency and how you feel this contributes, if at all, to household food security. This interview may be conducted in the privacy of your own home, or in an alternative location of your choice. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and notes will be taken throughout. After the interview has been conducted and transcribed, you will be contacted for a chance to review your responses in the form of a summary report.

Potential Harms and Benefits

By taking part in this study, you are providing information that will further add to the body of knowledge surrounding the ways in which food insecurity is being addressed in Nova Scotia. Although no benefits can be guaranteed, this information may be used in the future to improve the KAP, as well as to provide recommendations for other programs aimed at addressing food insecurity throughout Canada.

It should be acknowledged that your participation in this study will not have any impact (positive or negative) on your current employment with the KAP. The information you provide will not be connected to your name in anyway, and your responses will be shared only as a collective, along

with others with the KAP executive director in her role as my thesis committee member. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, or disallow inclusion of your responses in the final report. Furthermore, your participation in this project is completely voluntary and at any time, you may choose to withdraw from this study without question or penalty; any information you have provided will be destroyed accordingly.

Compensation

As a small token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a gift/fruit-basket.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality is extremely important. All responses you provide will be included in written reports under a numerical code or fictitious name. Your name will only be kept to contact you after your interview has been transcribed to review your responses – after which all identifying information will be removed from the data you have provided. The audio-taped interviews will be recorded than transcribed. Electronic data will be kept under password protection and transcribed data will be kept locked in a secure location at the Participatory and Action Research and Training Center on Food Security at Mount Saint Vincent University. Only my supervisors and I (the student researcher) will have access to this data.

In accordance to the Mount Saint Vincent Research Ethics Board, in the case that an audit of the research must be conducted, all data, including transcripts and audiotapes of the interviews will be kept in a secure location for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. After this period, all data will be destroyed accordingly.

Questions, Comments or Concerns

If you have any questions, please contact the student researcher, Sarah Lake (*personal email or (902) 457-5408) or faculty supervisors Dr. Patty Williams (patty.williams@msvu.ca) or Dr. Deborah Norris (deborah.norris@MSVU.ca)

If you have difficulties with, or concerns about any aspect of this research study, or wish to speak with someone not directly involved in this study, you may contact the Mount Saint Vincent's University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sarah Lake

Consent Form

I, _____ (*please print first and last name*) have read the information provided in the ***Letter of Information*** and agree to participate in this study.

I understand that:

- 1) This study will be carried out by Sarah Lake, a master's student at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) and that I will be asked questions about my involvement with the Kids Action Program (KAP) and my experiences with getting enough nutritious food and involvement in food-related programs.
- 2) My participation in this study is voluntary and I may leave at any time or decline to answer any question without penalty. Following my withdrawal, any data I have provided will be destroyed immediately.
- 3) All of my responses will be kept confidential, stored securely, and destroyed five years after the completion of this study, and that my name will not be associated with my responses in any manner.
- 4) That only Sarah Lake and her Supervisors (Dr Patty Williams and Dr Deborah Norris) will have access to original data.
- 6) If I have any concerns or questions with this study I may address them to Sarah, her supervisors, or a MSVU representative.
- 7) While it is hoped that this information will be used to improve programs within the KAP and other agencies across Canada, there is no guarantee that this will happen.
- 8) This interview will be audiotaped and that I may also choose, at any time, to participate without audio recording.

Date _____

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Student Investigator _____

Please indicate whether you would like to review a summary of your transcript:

Yes No

Best way to contact you to review your transcript:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Other: _____

Would you like a summary of the final results?

Yes No

Address (if you would like a mailed copy)

Email (if you would like an electronic copy): _____

Other: _____

APPENDIX C - Interview Guides



Building Food Security in Nova Scotia from the Ground Up: A Case Study of the Kid's Action Program

Interview Guide: KAP Participants

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of researcher/interviewer (MSc thesis project)

Purpose of the interview:

- To explore your experiences with the KAP as it relates to getting enough food for yourself or your family

Informed Consent; Forms; Confidentiality; Anonymity; Participant Rights; Audiotape Consent

START RECORDER

Exploring participants experiences with the KAP and their programs:

- Can you talk a bit about your experiences with the KAP.
 - How did you first hear of the KAP and their programs?
 - What initially made you decide to become involved?
 - Can you tell me a bit about the other of KAP's programs that you or members of your family members have participated in? How did you hear of these programs and what drew you to them?
 - *If a long standing participant:*
 - What is it about the KAP that has kept you involved over time?
 - *If a recent participant:*
 - What are you hoping to get from your involvement with the KAP?
 - Have you ever told others about the KAP or specific programs? Why or why not?
- Can you describe what you feel you have learned or gained through you involvement with the KAP? (Access to services, knowledge, skills, etc...)
 - Any opportunities you feel have been facilitated through your involvement with the KAP?
- Can you speak to the relationships you have with others involved with KAP (either staff or participants)?
- How do you feel your participation in the KAP has made a difference in your life, if at all? (Has it changed how you feel about yourself?)

Exploring potential contributions to household food security:

- Can you talk about your experiences in providing food for yourself and/or your family?

- What determines the foods you choose? (*Price, quality, etc...*)
- What are the most significant barriers or challenges you face, if any, in getting enough of the foods you need or want?
- Has there even been a time when you had difficulty getting enough nutritious foods for yourself or your family or were worried that you would be unable to do so? Can you tell me about it? How did it make you feel?
 - What led to this situation?
 - How did you deal with this situation? Were there strategies you used to acquire more food? (i.e. friends, food banks, quality vs. quantity, cut portions, etc.)
 - Did you or others in your family ever go hungry?
 - What impacts did this have on you or your family members? (*Health and otherwise...*)
- Thinking about your involvement with KAP, has your participation in any of their programs affected your ability to get enough food for yourself or your family in any way?
 - *Skill building around food*
 - *Access to foods to supplement budget*
 - *Social supports*
 - *Self-confidence*
- Other than through their programs, are there any other ways that your involvement in the KAP has impacted your experiences in getting food for yourself or your family?
 - *Connected to other services*
 - *Advocacy – help navigating through support systems*
 - *Educational/Employment opportunities*
- What does it mean to you to be food secure? Food insecure?
 - How has your involvement with the KAP changed how you think about, or approach food insecurity?

The potential for agencies and the programs they implement to contribute to household food security in Nova Scotia:

- How do you feel that the KAP is currently working to build food security :
 - For you personally?
 - For the children they serve?
 - For individuals and families within the KAP?
 - Within your community?
 - Throughout Nova Scotia?

- How do you feel that the KAP could be more engaged in efforts to build food security at all these levels, if at all;
 - Through their program design? Through their work as an agency?
- If you had some suggestions for other agencies or community based organizations looking to become engaged in work to address food security, what would they be?

Basic Demographic profile:

Age:

Community or residence:

Number of years involved with KAP:

Ethnic Background?

Children/Number of household members?

Employment?



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Building Food Security in Nova Scotia from the Ground Up: A Case Study of the Kid's Action Program

Interview Guide: KAP Project Staff and Key Community Liaisons

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of researcher/interviewer (MSc thesis project)

Purpose of the interview:

- To explore the levels in which the KAP is engaged in efforts to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia.

Informed Consent; Forms; Confidentiality; Anonymity; Participant Rights; Audiotape Consent

START RECORDER

First, I'd like to learn a little bit more about your role with the KAP:

- When did you first become involved with the KAP
- How would you describe your role within this agency?
 - What personally motivates you to stay involved with the KAP?
- How would you describe your relationships with participants involved in the KAP?
- What does food security and insecurity mean to you?
- Has participation in KAP's programs changed the way you think about or approach food security? About poverty?

The impacts of involvement in the KAP and household food security:

- What do you think are the most significant contributors to food insecurity for families that participate in the KAP?
 - Do you feel that programs within the KAP have been developed to address these issues? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
 - Do you feel this is an important and/or feasible role of the KAP and their programming? Why or why not? (*i.e. funding, resources etc.*)

- Are there other supports, services or opportunities provided through the KAP that you feel relates to building food security for participants and their families?

The potential for agencies and the programs they implement to contribute to household food security in Nova Scotia:

- How do you feel that the KAP is currently working to build food security :
 - For you personally?
 - For the children they serve?
 - For individuals and families within the KAP?
 - For others within your community?
 - Throughout Nova Scotia?
- How do you feel that the KAP could be more engaged in efforts to build food security at all these levels, if at all;
 - Through their program design? Through their work as an agency?
- If you had some suggestions for other agencies or community based organizations looking to become engaged in work to address food security, what would they be?

APPENDIX D – Ethics Approval



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University Research Ethics Board

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance

Title of project: *Growing Food Security in Nova Scotia from the Ground Up: A Case study of the Kids Action Program*

Researcher(s): Sarah Lake

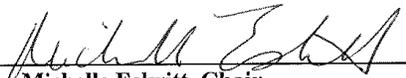
Supervisor (if applicable): Deborah Norris, Patty Williams

Co-Investigators: n/a

File #: 2011-020

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has reviewed the above named proposal and confirms that it respects the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* as outlined in the *MSVU Policies and Procedures: Ethics Review of Research Involving Humans* regarding the ethics of research involving human participants.

This certificate of ethics clearance is valid one year from the date of issue. Renewals are available for up to two years in addition to the initial year and are contingent upon an annual submission to the UREB of a written request for renewal accompanied by a satisfactory annual ethics report thirty days prior to the expiry date as listed below. A final report is required within 30 days of expiry. Researchers are reminded that any changes to approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the UREB prior to their implementation.


Dr. Michelle Eskritt, Chair
University Research Ethics Board (UREB)

October 7, 2011
Effective Date

[Expires: October 6, 2012]

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