



Social Connectedness Fellowship Program

Partnership Proposal



**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS**



Partnership Proposal

Partner Organization: Meal Exchange is a nationally registered charity that has inspired and empowered students across the country to create healthy, just, and sustainable food systems for over 25 years. We facilitate collaboration and innovation on post-secondary campuses, and act as a catalyst to increase access to good food for students.

Location of Fellow: Remote. Ontario could be beneficial if covid restrictions lift and we are able to host the National Student Food Summit in person this summer (likely in Ottawa).

Description of Proposed Project:

In 2021, Meal Exchange conducted a national food insecurity survey and 58.2% of student respondents reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted by COVID-19. As an organization, we have also seen a rise in mental health challenges among our student staff and volunteers. In addition, there is already research showing that adults living in food insecure households are more likely to experience a wide range of adverse mental health outcomes compared to those living in food secure households. According to Statistics Canada, among the general Canadian population, those who have experienced food insecurity during the pandemic reported significantly worse mental health outcomes than food-secure households.

In response to the rise in both food insecurity and mental health challenges among students, Meal Exchange would like to learn how to better communicate about these intersecting issues and support our student staff and community. We would also like to be able to provide resources/advice to post-secondary campuses and initiatives designed to address food insecurity



on how to navigate this mental health crisis, which is likely impacting students facing food insecurity disproportionately.

Skills/educational background:

- Strong writing skills and ability to communicate complex information to public audiences
- Attention to detail and copy editing skills
- Strong interpersonal skills to discuss challenging and sensitive issues
- Presentation skills; comfortable leading workshops online or in person
- Academic background in psychology, social work, food security or related field
- Demonstrated interest in food security and/or youth mental health

Key Deliverables:

- A final report (25–35 pages) that highlights the nature of student food insecurity and mental health, case studies and best practices, and provides recommendations for both Meal Exchange and post-secondary campuses. This report **can** include:
 - A review of literature to better understand how these issues intersect, this should include the work of student leaders
 - A scan of projects and experts addressing the intersection of mental health and food security as well as student leadership and mental health
 - Conducting interviews as necessary to improve our understanding of these intersecting issues better understand the nature of these issues as well as best practices or projects that Meal Exchange or post-secondary campuses could take on
 - Developing a report that outlines these results, best practices, inspiring case studies, and recommendations (written for a public audience; both students and campuses)



- A short designed document that Meal Exchange can provide to post-secondary campuses with advice on addressing student food insecurity and mental health (for example: includes recommendations on how to improve existing food security programs to be more inclusive to students experiencing mental health challenges or new ideas)
- A few social media posts with similar content that Meal Exchange can share.
- A webinar/workshop on mental health and food insecurity, highlighting the research results and recommendations, for the Meal Exchange community. This may take place as part of the National Student Food Summit or separately, depending on evolving covid restrictions.
- A 500-1000 word blog post to be published by SCSC and cross-posted by Meal Exchange.

Goals:

This research will help Meal Exchange to better address this growing issue by:

- Better understanding the nature and intersection of mental health and food insecurity, particularly among youth and post-secondary students
- Learning how to raise awareness about this issue among our community and provide support to students
- Learning from case studies of organizations or projects that have worked to address mental health and food insecurity to inform Meal Exchange programs (future and current)
- Providing a resource to support student food insecurity projects and post-secondary campuses to better address these intersecting challenges

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