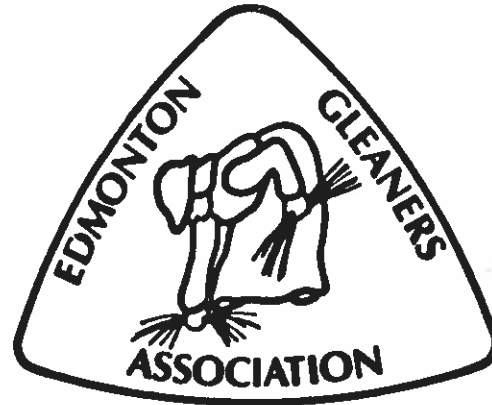


What Next?



A Survey of Singles Who Use the Food Bank

Other Key Findings	Page 2
Why We Did the Survey	Page 3
How We Did the Survey	Page 4
Some Basic Information	Page 5
Need and Dependence	Page 6
Single Employables	Page 7
	Page 8
	Page 9
	Page 10
Unemployable Singles	Page 11
	Page 12
	Page 13
Emergency Food Vouchers	Page 14
	Page 15
Thanks	Page 16

We found that . . .

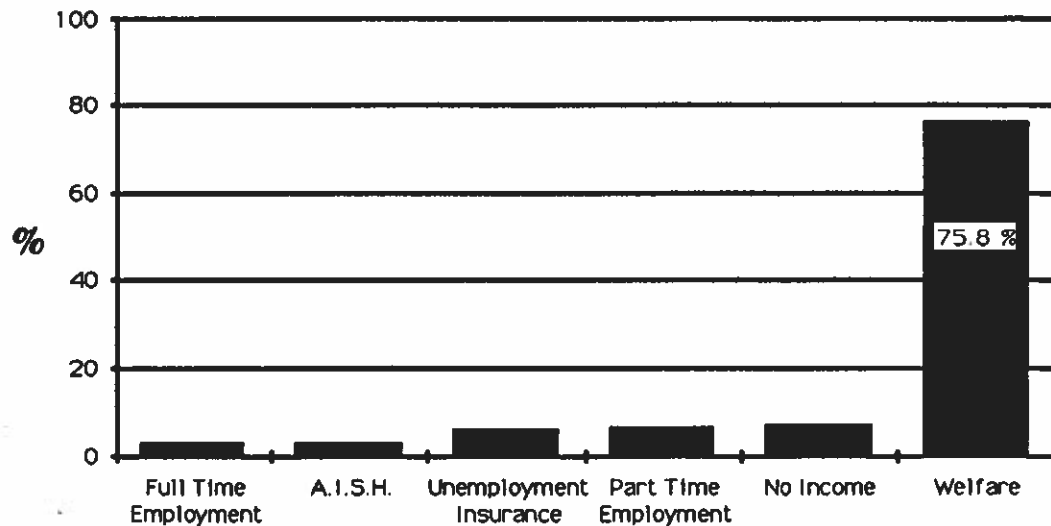
Large numbers of single people in our city are in a situation of great and continuing need for basic sustenance. For many of our clients, food bank aid that began as an occasional emergency resource has now become an ongoing subsidy - vital help in a continuing emergency.

Although we recognize that using the food bank is, in itself, a smart survival skill, this level of use makes us afraid that many singles are dangerously close to becoming dependent on our fragile resources of food stocks, both donated and gleaned, as well as our volunteer agency network



© Thanks to Mayes & the Journal for permission.

Major Source of Income of Our Single Clients



Other Key Findings:

- For many of these single citizens, in need of a great many things, the food bank network is, other than the government, the only place they go to get help (see Page 6).
- High demand in both severity of need and frequency of need by single employable people who had their benefits slashed has provided sad proof of the link between affordable shelter and being able to afford food (Page 8).
- The great need of those on welfare is not confined to those affected by cutbacks. Many people who are sick, injured, or unsuited for work (unemployable singles), whose benefits were maintained at pre-April 1987 levels, are still in a position of both acute and chronic need (Page 12).
- Alberta Social Services seldom offers effective emergency food help to their clients, a situation made worse by the low levels of basic assistance that make emergency situations frequent and inevitable (Page 14).

Why We Did the Survey:

- As its title indicates, we decided to do the survey because we were worried about what would happen next to the people on welfare who had their shelter and food allowances cut back. We wanted to record what happened to them in the months after the cuts.
- Experience from the cutbacks in welfare rates in 1983, which saw an average 439% per month increase in need for hampers, had taught us that we could expect a great deal of extra strain to be put on the food bank network as well.
- So, with the help of the United Way, and together with the Edmonton Social Planning Council, we set out to learn about and record how single people on welfare were doing.



Thank you for taking the time to look at this report.

If you have questions or comments about what you have read, we would like to hear from you. Please call us at 425-4190. The main food bank warehouse (and office) is at 9020 - Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5L 4J7.

However, what is true about the food bank remains true:

- Distributing food to help hungry people is our work - it is what we do. When we look at the quantity of food gleaned from local suppliers we say "a smart society uses what it makes".
- When we look at the donated food that fills the warehouse after a major drive we say "this food is a gift from the people of Edmonton to the people of Edmonton", and we feel the responsibility of stewardship.
- And when we look at the people who come to us for help we feel a responsibility to help with food, and also, occasionally, to speak up clearly when something hurts or helps them. When we do this we understand we are joining the world of public discussion and debate.
- But we also feel strongly that talking about things is only one of the things that we do - and if we find ourselves getting too involved with discussions that just go around and around, without ever getting anywhere, we reserve the right, when faced with the next round, to say "thanks, we'd love to stay and talk, but we have to get back to work".

The Questionnaire

- We thought the best way to learn about our single clients would be to go out and talk to them, so we designed a questionnaire that would give us some basic information, with a special emphasis on food and shelter.
- We also tried to include questions that would encourage people to tell us what was interesting and important to them about their situation.
- The questionnaire was developed with the help of Edmonton Social Services, then reviewed and revised (to guard against bias) by independent experts.

The Sample

- We wanted to make sure that the survey results would be truly representative of single food bank users. To this end we identified a group (or cluster) of food bank agencies that were representative in terms of type of client access (closed or open), size of agency, type of food program (institutional or hamper-based), and type of agency (primarily whether the food program was their only program, or whether they offered other programs as well). We identified (and surveyed at) 14 agencies out of 38.
- The survey represents 232 valid interviews; we estimate that the food bank serves between 2700 - 3200 singles per month, so we believe that it is a valid and representative sample of single food bank users.

- We defined singles in accordance with Alberta Social Services definitions because so many of our single clients are on welfare. Because we wanted to get at the effects of the cutbacks we had to define and count people the same way that Alberta Social Services does.
- Single employables: persons not married and co-habiting, or not living together as though married, and without dependent children, who are able to work.
- Single parents: are usually a different group than single employables. But Alberta Social Services does sometimes classify one as the other (for instance, a single parent with one dependent child over 4 months). In practice this happens rarely, so we did not survey anyone with dependent children.
- Unemployable Singles: persons who are not married and co-habiting, or not living together as though married, and without dependent children, who are not able to work because of sickness or injury or who are unlikely to be able to find work because of age or some other factor.

How We Did the Survey:

- We were uncertain as to when and for how long the cuts would show up and have consequences, so we interviewed for different periods of each month for July - August, September - October and October - November.
- The tornado turned us all upside-down a little and many of our survey volunteers were busy because of it, so we shut the survey down for August.
- Our original plan had been to interview two separate representative groups, to chart change over time. This proved too difficult to do so we did one survey over an extended period of time.
- We did not try, however, to restrict the sample to only those on welfare - all people that we met who were single (alone and without a spouse or dependent kids) were interviewed.

- All interviews were done face-to-face by a crew of food bank volunteers recruited and trained for this project. We are very proud of their work and believe that it stands as a job professionally and compassionately done.
- All interviews were done on a confidential basis. The procedure at each agency was to introduce ourselves to people as they were waiting to pick up their hamper and explain who we were, what we were doing, and that we wanted to talk to any who were single after they picked up their hampers. This helped to ensure that no one would feel coerced into participating for fear that their hamper might be jeopardized by their candor.
- No specific information about individual clients arising from the survey was shared with agency volunteers.

• Our data were analyzed through SPSSPC(Plus). The report was prepared on the Macintosh using Pagemaker (yeah!).

- Prairie winters remind us that this is hard country, sometimes. We learn again that it is generally dangerous to get too tired, too hungry, or too cold for too long. The information that we have developed through the survey and presented in this report is, necessarily, basic and general. And it is sort of obvious to mention that it is about particular people, most of them on welfare and many of them having some very basic problems.
- And it is sort of obvious too, to mention that these very basic problems, if not worked on, usually get worse over time. A few years of being a student and sharing cheap rent while scrimping on groceries are OK, but after graduation, if a good job doesn't come along and the friends move away and the student loan is due - you may be in a bit of trouble. And if you take a job for a low wage, after a little more time your clothes wear out and start to look a little out of date, and your chances of getting a good job start to slip away. And then if you get laid-off from the low wage job . . . So it goes.
- So, please understand this material as a report on people who are part of a process involving obvious and general conditions that are moving to the particular and the dangerous. All the time.

Some Basic Information

Those surveyed had used an average of 6 hampers in 1987. Close to 4 of those hampers had been used since the cutbacks. Over the period of the survey (July to November) the number of people who told us they had used the food bank before rose from 75% to 90% in our random samples.

Overall, answering an open-ended question, 21.3% said they needed the food bank because of welfare cutbacks, 19.6% were in need because of a chronic shortage (of food or money to buy food), and 10.9% were in need because of a delayed cheque.

Average Food/Shelter Costs & Income per Month

	On Welfare	Everyone
Food	\$132.90	\$131.46
Shelter	\$247.15	\$250.93
Income	\$359.94	\$375.91

Note: Does not include other basics.

- This 50 year old man has been on welfare for 5 1/2 years. He is in poor health - was in an AADAC program, then was working and living with his sister, but now she is too busy to help so things have fallen apart. He is on his own now, needs medical care; the doctor said to apply for A.I. S. H. (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) but he hasn't. He relies on the Marian Centre daily.
- This is a 35 year old man who has been unemployed for five months. He is on welfare and has been looking for work. His landlord took his belongings for rent. He says he has a negative attitude but the interviewer thought not - he has no friends, didn't know about emergency food vouchers, has no relatives and lives alone with very little money. He was in Alberta Hospital previously.
- This 44 year old man has been unemployed for 5 months; he is a pipeline worker by trade and has been on and off welfare for 3 years. He just found out about vouchers from the Bissell Centre, but has not tried for one yet. He lives alone since his brother sold all his stuff while he was out of town. He is in good health but says it has been several months since he has had enough of the right kinds of food to eat.

Great Need - Hunger and Nutrition Among Single People in Edmonton

We asked people if they got enough of the right kinds of food to eat:

- **Nearly 60% told us that they suffered from a poor diet.**

(Asked informally, the things that people missed having most were meats, milk and eggs; things that the food bank is seldom able to offer.)

We asked people if, between the food bank and all other sources, they got enough to eat:

- **Nearly 30% told us that they went hungry part of the time.**

(Going hungry from lack of food is, of course, very different from going hungry between breakfast and lunch.)

Please turn back to the previous page and look again at the three "personal histories":

- Each of these people lives in a very complex situation that would be difficult to deal with under any circumstances. Hunger and poor nutrition are only a part of that situation; help from the food bank can and often does "free-up" income for rent (and other fixed-cost items) that would otherwise have to be spent on food.
- But, if that subsidy is used often enough there is a real danger to that person's well-being if the subsidy is suddenly cutback or withdrawn. Our hampers are not always great.
- The lack of resources, or awareness of other resources than the food bank offers, is something we must think through carefully - we may not be able to provide the necessary information to help our clients find what they need.

Thinking about Dependence:

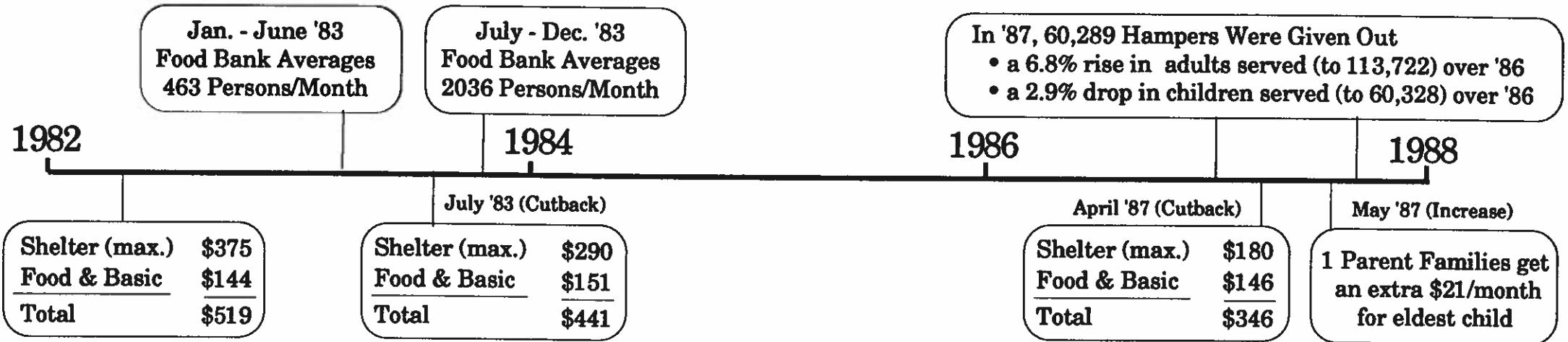
- Twenty-one percent of the people we surveyed had one or more food bank hampers (per month) from us between Christmas of 1986 and when we talked to them in 1987. This high usage does cause us concern.
- But right now the food bank has no set standard to measure dependence against. The more detailed information developed from this survey will be used as a beginning to develop such a standard.

Lack of other Resources:

- Nearly 88% told us that they do not obtain help of any kind from any agency (non-governmental) other than the food bank, whether it was food, clothing or some other item, or help with a personal problem.
- Also, over 40% reported that they had no friends to turn to for a sympathetic ear or a small loan to tide them over.
- Over 60% have no relatives who can help; often it was the same group of people who had neither friends or relatives. And often, as well, people told us that the friends and relatives that they did have were in dire straits too.

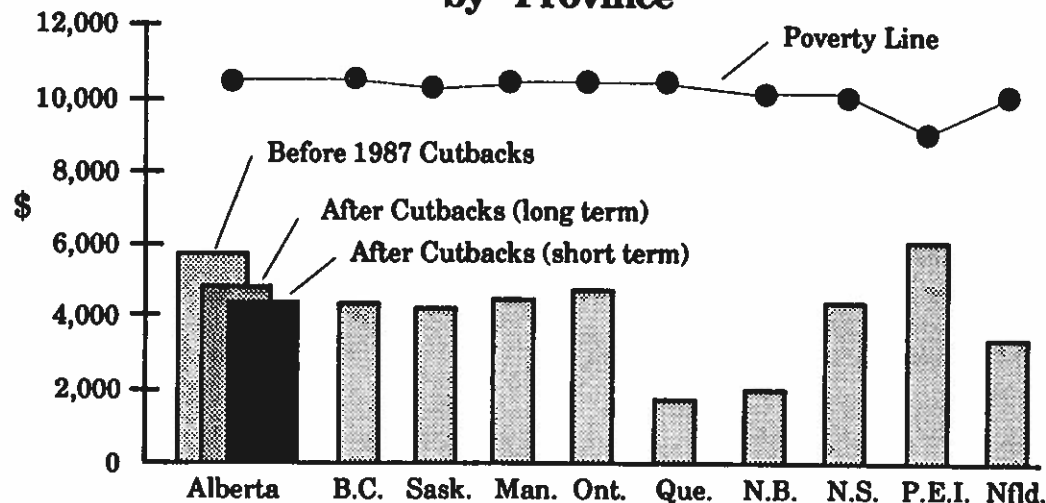
Why We Fear Dependence:

- Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the operation and they have been taxed to the limit to handle the need for quite some time. One heart attack can put a small agency under and leave a food program that helped a whole neighborhood at risk. People in need may not be able to travel very far and the closest agency may not be able to handle any extra hampers.
- Food stocks gleaned with the help of local suppliers change constantly, especially in these hard times as merchants try to become more cost-efficient. The generosity of Edmontonians is a daily fact for us, but we must always respect the limits of the donor.
- In sum, we cannot be, and will not try to be, a substitute for an adequate social safety net.



Recent Fortunes of Single Employables (and the Food Bank)

Estimated Welfare Income of Singles by Province



- The time-line above shows the close relationship between welfare benefits, single people and demand on the food bank. It shows the rates for people just starting on welfare; "short-term" employables. After being on welfare for three continuous months you become a "long-term" employable and your shelter allowance goes up \$35 to \$215 (maximum). In addition, clients then become eligible for a range of other benefits, including clothing and household allowances. The April '87 cuts included a \$5 food cutback.
- It should also be noted that when Alberta Social Services took the positive step of providing \$21 per month for single parent families, the food bank recorded a 2.9% drop in numbers of children served.
- The graph on the left, compiled from information in the National Council on Welfare's report *The Tangled Safety Net*, shows Canada-wide rates. The rates shown are averaged over one year and include the higher long-term figures that result from increased benefits over time.

Single Employables Work History:

- Last source of income (before welfare):
 - full time work (61.4%)
 - part time work (15.9%)
 - unemployment insurance (9.1%)
 - no income (4.5%)
 - other (9.1%)

	How long Unemployed?	Longest job last 2 years?
• 3 months or less	(27.1%)	(25.3%)
• 4 to 6 months	(15.3%)	(20.6%)
• 7 to 12 months	(23.5%)	(38.1%)
• 1 to 2 years	(21.2%)	(15.9%)
• 2 to 5 years	(9.4%)	(n/a)
• 5 or more years	(3.5%)	(n/a)

This is a group still firmly grounded in the working world, expecting and wanting to get back to it. When asked informally, many identified a good job as the most important solution to their problems. Temporary difficulties have led them to us; 37.3% expect to use the food bank less in the future, 48.2% about the same, and only 14.5% expect to need us more.

Single Employables - Age and Schooling:

- The age range of this group was:
 - under 26 (34.0%)
 - 26 to 35 (30.7%)
 - 36 to 50 (28.4%)
 - over 50 (6.8%)
- The education level of this group was:
 - Junior High or Grade School (35.2%)
 - Some High School (51.1%)
 - Some Trade School or University (13.7%)

Definition:

- Alberta Social Services classifies people as single employables if they are not married or living together as though married and able to work.
- According to the Department, single parents can be classified as single employables if, for instance, they have only one child and that child is over four months of age. In practical fact, however, we found so few single parents who were classified as single employables that we decided to screen out any singles who had dependent children, to make sure that we had a group that was all alike.
- This group of single people not living together as married, or actually married, and able to work formed 38% of our sample. 92% were men, 8% were women.

Single Employables & Shelter

Housing type:

- rooming house (22.7%)
- bachelor apartment (21.6%)
- 1 bedroom apartment (28.4%)
- 2 bedroom apartment (6.8%)
- house (17.0%)
- other (3.4%)

Room and Board:

- Only 3 of 88 were in room and board situation.

Housing conditions:

- good or very good (38.6%)
- fair (37.5%)
- poor or very poor (21.6%)

Sharing:

- Forty percent shared housing.
- 32% of these started sharing since cutbacks (3/4 to save money or because of cutbacks).
- 85.7% found sharing was working out fairly or very well.

Changes in Housing

How Many Moved:

- 54.5% had moved since the cutbacks
- of those that had moved, 70.2% had moved once, 17.0% had moved twice, 8.5% had moved three times.

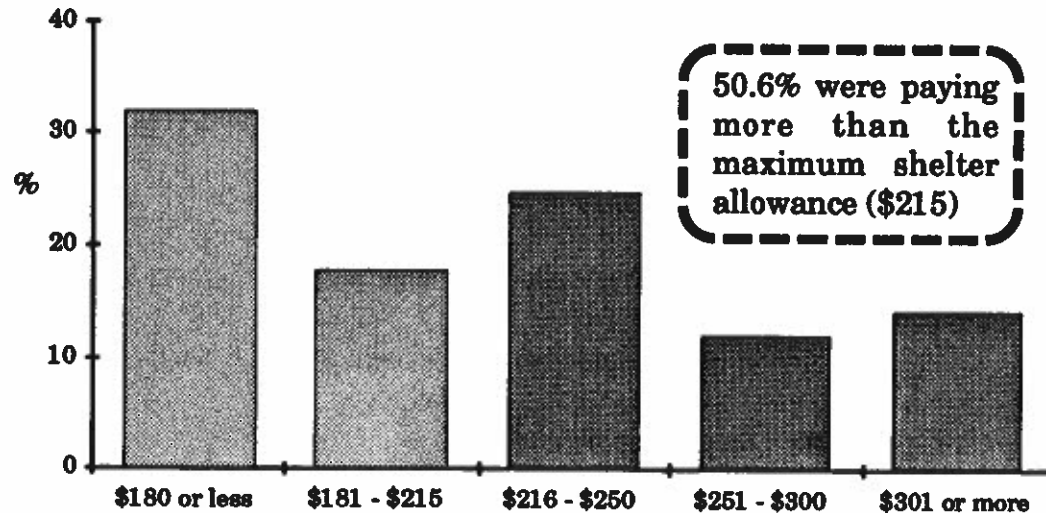
Who They Share With:

- 91.2% of those sharing were doing so with friends or family.

Why They Moved:

- couldn't afford (27.1%)
- cutbacks (12.5%)
- for work (12.5%)
- misfortune or misadventure (12.5%)
- found better place (12.5%)
- poor housing (8.3%)
- other (10.4%)

Current Rent and Utilities



Previous Housing - better or worse?

- When asked to compare their previous housing to their present housing, 46.8% said the place they were in before was much better or better than the place they are in now. Nearly 15 percent said they were the same.
- However, 27.7% said their previous housing was worse than what they had now, 8.5% said their old place was much worse.
- The rent and utilities costs of people's previous housing were higher than what they were paying now. 26.2% were paying between \$251 and \$300 before, 26.2% were paying \$301 or more, and 47.5% were paying less than \$250 before.
- So moving didn't always mean moving into poorer conditions; but better conditions often depended on having a friend or relative to move in with. A penalty to those without friends or family.

Damage Deposits:

- Perhaps the most important handicap that singles who are looking for housing while they are on welfare face is the fact that damage deposits are not offered as a benefit.
- Instead, you are required to take a form to the landlord that you want to rent from, have him fill in that he is willing to rent to you, and take it back to your worker.
- Many landlords dislike or are unwilling to rent to people under these conditions. This limits accomodation. Those willing to rent often charge maximum rates regardless of quality.
- Shelter limits are \$180 to start, \$215 after 3 months. Often it seems the effect of this policy is to force people out of stable living situations and into poor housing or the hostels.

Amount from Welfare (\$)

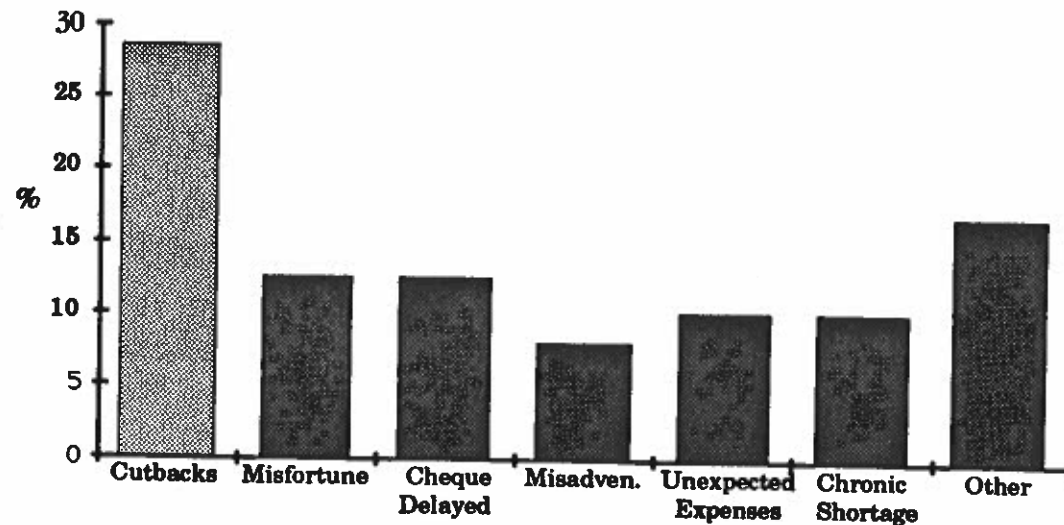
Under \$300	8.8%
\$300 - \$349	15.0%
\$350 - \$399	32.5%
\$400 - \$449	21.3%
\$450 or more	22.5%

This table shows the amount that single employables received from welfare. In most cases this is their only source of income. People on welfare are allowed to work part-time, but only 4 out of the 88 single employables we talked to had found such work.

- 45.9% felt welfare didn't meet their needs very well.
- 25.0% felt welfare met their needs fairly well.

Single Employables

Reasons for Needing the Food Bank



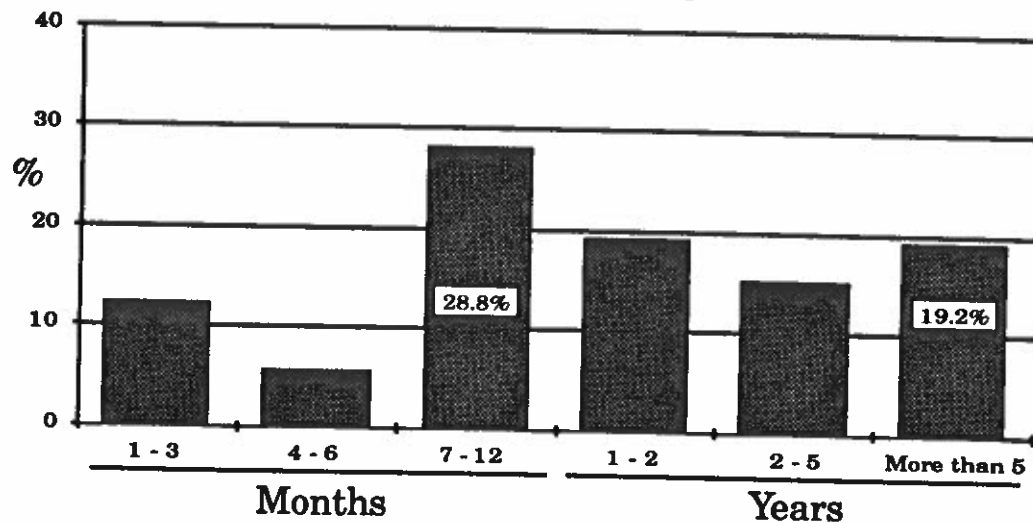
To Sum Up:

- The cutbacks in shelter set off a time of great turmoil. Rents are not often negotiable; a great many had to move.
- Having a friend or a relative to share with did increase your chances of handling the cutbacks. Those without friends or relatives sometimes faced some nasty choices. As one man told us: " All it meant in my building was that the drunks moved in with the drunks, and the druggies moved in with the druggies. And then I had to move out."
- Paying maximum rates for a lousy place is something that leaves a sour feeling, whether it is your money or the government's. The need for a place to live that is quiet and safe is a need that we all share.
- As the graph shows, the effect of the cutbacks on our client's housing situation were effects on the food bank as well.

Definition:

- Alberta Social Services defines people as unemployable if they are unable to work because of mental or physical problems, or because of age or other factors that make it unlikely that the person would be able to get a job. As the graph shows, most of these people have been on welfare for quite some time.
- We found people in this group to have a relatively uniform distribution by age. Thirty-one percent were over 50, while 32% were 35 or under; few were unemployable because of age.
- This group, 32.3% of our sample, were often more aware of welfare benefits, but their need for the food bank remains great.

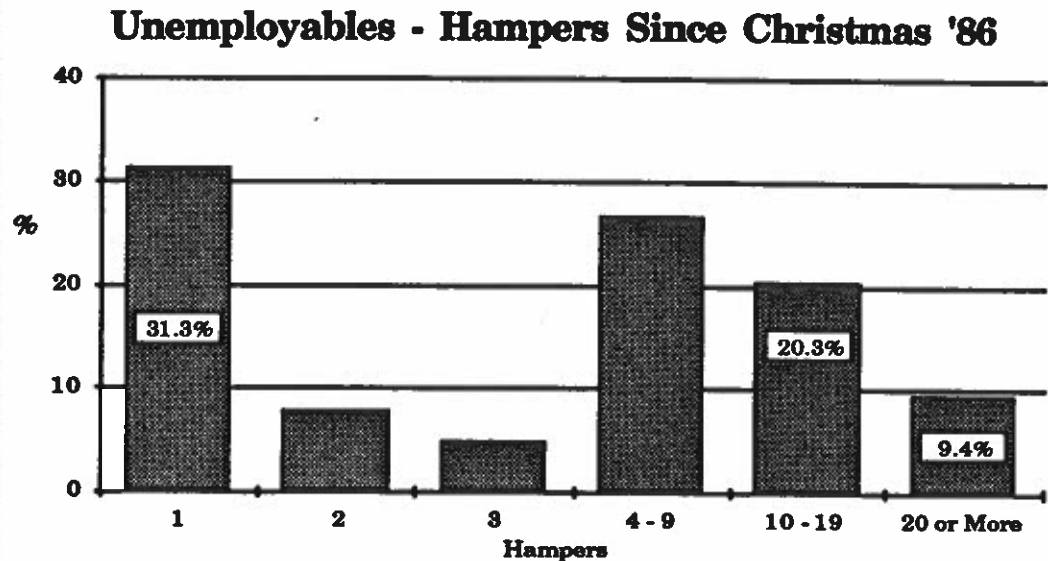
Unemployables - How Long on Welfare?



Unemployable Singles:

- "I Had My Own Little Tornado Six Years Ago" is what one man said, in telling us about the rig accident that ended his working life at age 22. And with braces on his wrists, a canvas and velcro brace for his back, steel pins in his legs and hip and a steel plate in his skull, our interviewer didn't think he was exaggerating one bit.
- Many others we met are victims of "slow tornados" like arthritis or tuberculosis; they have been on welfare for a long time (please see graph) and chances are they will find it difficult to get well and back to work.
- Forty-seven percent of this group told us they had been institutionalized recently - 31% were in hospital for physical reasons, 4% were in for problems of the mind, and the others had alcohol or drug problems joined with illness, or were in jail.
- For many in this group, a regular trip to the food bank is something they can do to help themselves, something that helps them get back on their feet and moving.
- Sixty-one percent of this group reported their health as "poor"; we often wondered if they might not qualify for extra benefits of some sort or even for Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped which provides a much higher basic income.

- As the graph shows, unemployable people are heavy users of the food bank, with 20% using one or more hampers per month and nearly 10% using two or more.
- And with nearly 33% paying more than the shelter maximum of \$290, combined with such heavy usage and such poor health, again we must give careful thought to the potential for dependence among this group.
- But the picture is not all sad and grim. We found, in general, that this group had good survival skills from having to get by on so little for so long. It would be a mistake and an insult to picture them as helpless. Often we wished that this group could share some of their skills with newer clients.



Unemployable Singles

- This 51 year old man has been on welfare for six years. He was badly burned and is in poor health, unable to work. He says he usually does OK for the right kinds of food on welfare - he has been to Sacred Heart six times since last Christmas. He was on a pension but the pension was cut back - he is now selling his furniture for money to live on. Has Grade 1 education.
- This man is 52 years old. He was a plumber, but has not worked at his trade in the 17 years since he was injured. His health remains poor and he needs a cane to help him walk. Told us that the food bank hamper is a help, but he feels badly that some of it goes to waste as he has nowhere to store the perishables. He was in the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital before he was on welfare, has no friends or relatives, lives alone in very poor conditions, was not aware of emergency food vouchers and often goes hungry.
- This 42 year old woman is in poor health, both mental and physical. She is on welfare and unable to work - before this she was in Alberta Hospital (nervous breakdown). She didn't know about emergency food vouchers. She is happy with her present accommodation (sharing) and would like to do housecleaning or babysitting to get back to work.

Alberta Social Services and Emergency Vouchers:

Policy: If a person "has a reasonable explanation for being without food or money to buy food" they should be helped.

A "reasonable explanation" includes; administrative problems like a late cheque or a lost file, visiting relatives, extra ordinary bills for essential needs, as well as misfortune such as loss of money or a death in the family.

Procedure: A person in need should (1) call their social worker (2) if their worker is unavailable, say that it is an emergency and ask for the emergency intake worker or Supervisor (3) be prepared to explain and support a reasonable explanation.

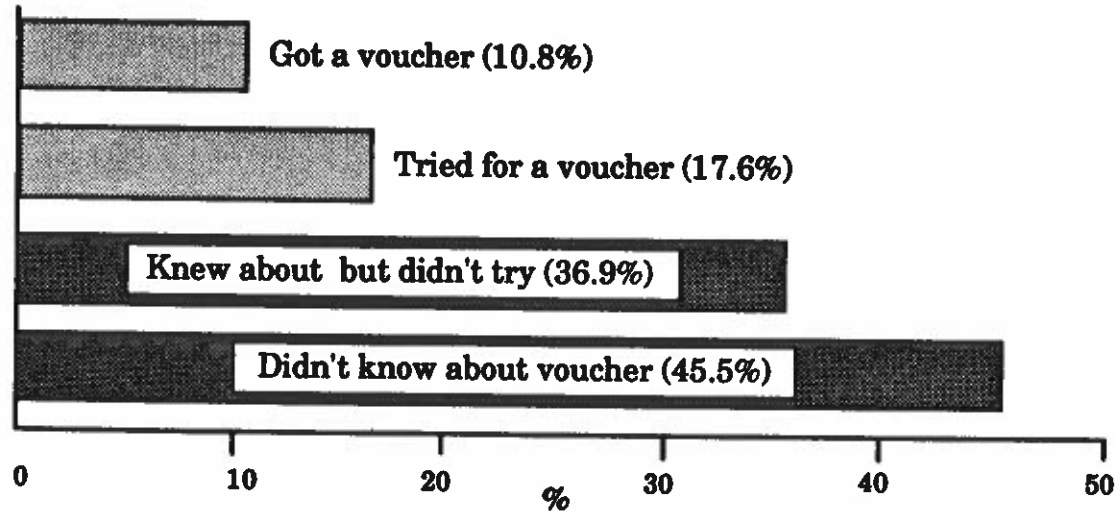
Practice: Social workers are usually burdened with very full case loads; it can be very difficult for a client in need to get through to their worker or reach the emergency worker.

In informal conversation the people we surveyed told us that when they had been turned down for a voucher they usually were reluctant to try again, for fear that if they "bothered their worker" they might lose out on other benefits (like money for a winter coat or laundry allowance) that might be more important or useful (for more information, see next page).

Problems: Emergency food vouchers are not available on the basis of need - you can only get one per month. Before the new income security policy manual came out, there seemed to be some flexibility that allowed the social worker to respond to need.

Now the rule of one voucher per month seems to be more rigidly enforced. The problem with this is that late cheques or lost money problems often happen at the beginning of the month just after cheques come out. As it is now the person who's emergency happens at the beginning of the month and who needs food for several weeks gets the same amount as someone who has only a few days to wait.

Welfare Singles and Emergency Vouchers



Food Vouchers and the Food Bank

- Emergency food vouchers are the way Alberta Social Services provides people on welfare with help when, through no fault of their own, they run short of food or money to buy food (please see above for policy and procedures).
- The lack of ready availability of these vouchers, even to those who seem to qualify, is often a source of great frustration to our clients and to the food bank. Often the food bank is asked to help with a hamper if the client can't get a voucher. **Of the 176 people on welfare surveyed, only 19 had recently received a voucher.**
- A voucher for a single person is \$22 - they have been the same amount since 1983.

- It is important to point out that there is an element of choice in people using the food bank or trying to get a voucher (please see adjacent quotes).
- We understand that people probably don't come to the food bank if they are able to get a voucher unless and until the voucher runs out as well.
- We also understand that people can't make use of a resource that they don't know about; 45.5 % of those on welfare that we surveyed didn't even know about emergency food vouchers, or if they were eligible for one.
- In contrast, nearly 80% of those surveyed were aware of the transportation allowance and nearly 65% were aware they could receive a phone allowance.

Why People were Reluctant to try for a Voucher:

- "I don't want the voucher to affect regular welfare payments or files on me".
- "Have not seen a social worker yet, or at least regarding a food voucher."
- "Told by social worker I'm not eligible to receive a food voucher every month."
- "Knew social worker would say no."
- "Was refused in the past".
- "The Food Bank is easier."
- "I received a food voucher last month and the food bank fills in."
- "I was told by social worker that the voucher amount would come out of my welfare payment."

Budgetting:

- Alberta Social Services has a mandate to help make sure that the money they give people is used effectively. A common criticism of people on welfare is that they handle money poorly and don't budget properly. This can and does happen in some cases; when we see it happen it bothers food bank workers as well, even though it is the exception, not the rule.
- We asked our clients who are on welfare if Alberta Social Services had suggested that they needed help with budgetting: 19 of 176 had budgetting help suggested, 5 of those 19 had gotten some help, and 2 of the 5 told us that it helped.

To the survey volunteers, who realized that this project was about listening as well as asking, and who did it again and again.

To the many agency volunteers who made us welcome even when we arrived on really tough days.

Thank You



Thank You

To City of Edmonton Social Services for questionnaire design and help with data analysis.

To the men and women who answered our long list of questions with patience and kindness.

Funded by:  **United Way**
OF EDMONTON AND AREA

Prepared by: Doug Hunter, Survey Project Coordinator (March, 1988)