

Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Collective Cooking Spaces:

A Case Study of Roots to Harvest

by

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my committee.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis explores how non-profit organizations can use Collective Cooking Spaces (CCS) to support the populations they serve, integrate culture into their programming, and address equity issues. The research presented here focuses on the opportunities for connection over disconnection by exploring the possibilities of bringing together cooking, culture, and equity in organizational programming. The research involves a qualitative case study of Roots to Harvest (R2H), an organization in Thunder Bay, Ontario, that uses food as a conduit for change within individuals and communities. A social constructivism research framework has been applied to understand the individual and collective learning within CCS. Five program participants and four program facilitators of R2H's CCS were interviewed, from which thematic analysis of the data was carried out. This analysis shows that R2H has built its foundation on belonging and connection; R2H uses a strength-based approach to building skills and self-esteem in CCS participants. The research shows that culture was well incorporated into the CCS programming, with culturally tailored programs available. Participants were encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences with their CCS groups. R2H is looking at ways to incorporate teaching and actionable items concerning social issues within the CCS. Currently, the organization attempts to mitigate the impacts of social determinants of health and inequities on CCS participants through various methods of making CCS programs more accessible. These findings can prove helpful to R2H and other organizations doing similar food work wishing to include equity programming into their mandates and can contribute to scholarly literature and broader conversations of CCS evolution.

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A Case Study of Roots to Harvest

Chapter 1: Introduction

In October 2019, I was part of the kitchen team of volunteers responsible for preparing traditional Anishinaabe food for approximately 100 people through an event hosted by the Indigenous Food Circle¹ in Thunder Bay. On the first day, Haudenosaunee Chef Rich Francis, owner of Seventh Fire Indigenous Cuisine, taught me how to singe pin feathers from Canada goose and use cedar, sage, and sweetgrass braising, and prepare moose nose in a pressure cooker. He wasn't available to help on the second day, so I rolled up my sleeves, asked community members for advice, and braised two dressed but not butchered beavers. Our kitchen dream team pulled off a successful event highlighting the beauty of Indigenous foods and the importance (and deliciousness) of wild game in Traditional Ojibwe culture.

As I learned from this experience and through more than two decades of culinary experience, food is much more than just nourishment for the body. Since time immemorial, people have broken bread with others across diverse places and cultures to build relationships, share stories, commemorate life transitions, and celebrate important moments. However, food connects us (Pollan, 2014), sharing food encourages people to share thoughts, experiences, and their lives with others. But, as much as it has connected us, historically, some food practice policies and strategies have divided us (Daschuk, 2019). My research presented through this thesis focuses on the opportunities for connection over disconnection by exploring the

¹ The Indigenous Food Circle is a collaborative network led by Indigenous People with the support of settler partners promoting Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination through food initiatives (<https://foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca/indigenous-circle/>).

possibilities of bringing together cooking, culture, and equity in not-for-profit organizational programming.

Problem/Opportunity Statement

Many people across Canada are experiencing mounting stress and pressure due to working for low wages, being forced to hold multiple jobs, or experiencing job loss. In addition, these challenges have been amplified due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Men & Tarasuk, 2020). Having enough time and money to cultivate healthful life-enriching activities, including cooking nutritious meals, is at a premium for all of us. Healthy meal preparation and a work-life balance, including time for socialization, are often sacrificed due to rising food costs, unavailability of nutritious foods, and increased work hours; many people experiencing chronic hunger resort to eating “pseudo foods” (Winson, 2017), or nutritionally lacking convenience foods (Fano et al., 2004; Furber et al., 2010).

Not having regular access to diverse, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods can negatively affect mental and physical health. Veeraraghavan et al. (2016) and Tarasuk & Vogt (2009) describe a rapidly occurring "domino effect" on all aspects of people's lives when they experience sustained food insecurity and prolonged hunger connected to poverty and inequity. Mental well-being is negatively affected when paired with higher stress levels, food insecurity, and poor social support and belonging (Martin et al., 2016). Having a sense of belonging has been linked to many benefits over a person's lifespan, including increased mental and physical well-being, less stress, better social relationships, and satisfaction with life (Allen & Kern, 2017). But what is belonging? Allen et al. (2021) define belonging as “a subjective feeling that one is an integral part of their surrounding systems, including family, friends, school, work environments, communities, cultural groups, and physical places.” Furthermore, many

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adults who find themselves in challenging economic situations where they are overworked, underpaid, and experiencing chronic hunger, lack the money, time and skills needed to prepare nutritious meals with inexpensive, staple ingredients (Lichtenstein, 2010; Maharaj, 2020).

Cooking and eating together have been associated with improving mental wellbeing and alleviating the stress related to economic and social isolation in people involved with CCS (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2007a, 2007b, 2005).

Historical trauma and the continued effects of colonial practices affect BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour) populations and have contributed to disrupting intergenerational food knowledge from generation to generation (Kwik, 2007; Baskin, 2008). In Canada, the forced attendance of Indigenous Peoples in residential and day schools has caused cataclysmic damage to generations of people, including the loss of culture, language, land, and food practices (Baskin, 2008; Neufeld et al., 2017; Shukla et al., 2019; Levkoe et al., 2019).

Historical trauma has been used to describe emotional injuries experienced by multiple generations of specific racial, ethnic, or cultural groups, usually in relation to major oppressive events (e.g. the Holocaust, slavery, or violent colonization of Indigenous people). These psychological wounds can manifest in different ways, including low self-worth, depression, substance misuse and abuse, aggressive behaviour, and high rates of suicide or other destructive behaviour (Evans-Campbell, 2008; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021)

These challenges all relate to the social determinants of health (SDOH), the political, economic, and social factors that influence and shape people's health and the circumstances of their daily life (WHO, 2021). Studying these influences at a population level can affect public health policy direction, impacting individuals' lives. Income, education, food insecurity, social exclusion, Indigenous status, and social safety network are all recognized as SDOH (CPHA,

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2019); I consider the influence of SDOH on people involved in this research, viewed through the lens of the intersection of cooking, culture and equity within CCS.

People cooking together has been described as one way to curb the destructiveness of poverty, loneliness, and trauma on health and wellbeing (Neufeld et al., 2017; Baskin, 2008; Mundel & Chapman, 2010). Research has demonstrated that gathering together to make and 'break bread' can help alleviate feelings of social isolation (Hwa Lee et al., 2010; Hand & Kaiser, 2019), as well as improve participants' food literacy and hands-on meal preparation skills (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2006; Fakharzadeh, 2015). For example, from the perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing, cooking together and sharing food has helped heal from continued colonial effects, systems, and practices, reconnecting Indigenous people to their stolen past with traditional practices (Sherman & Dooley, 2017; Neufeld et al., 2017). It has been shown that through traditional food preparation, ethnic identity can be developed and maintained, helping racialized people find a sense of belonging (Twiss, 2007; Slocum, 2010). Newly immigrated people encountering disadvantage and discrimination based on their ethnicity, immigration status, geographic location, language capabilities, and experience with trauma have found community and friendship cooking together in communal kitchens (Hughes, 2018; Hand & Kaiser, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2019). Beyond connecting people to their heritage, cultures, and learning about food literacy and hands-on preparation skills, participation in cooking together can elevate the people by developing self-efficacy (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2006; Fakharzadeh, 2015; Hand & Kaiser, 2019).

In my research, I use Collective Cooking Spaces (CCS) to describe the kitchen spaces where people come together to cook, located within neighbourhoods or organizations driven by and for a particular population's needs. These may include, for example, low-income people,

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new or lone parents, immigrants, seniors, or students (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999). My idea of CCS has come from an amalgamation of the ideals of Collective and Community Kitchens – where people gather to cook, share stories and information, and learn from each other.

Some CCS have also encouraged teaching and promoting advocacy work to address equity issues, which can help to elevate the underlying SDOH for communities (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011; Maharaj, 2020). Directly discussing, providing supports, or accessing program funding helping to alleviate issues such as poverty, racism, oppression, and environmental degradation into CCS also has the potential to spur advocacy and activism amongst the group, leading to engagement in social justice activities (Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006; Levkoe, 2006; Maharaj, 2020). Providing greater connectedness and belonging opportunities can empower people to work together on projects outside of meal creation; social justice movements have been borne out of some of these kitchen groups, as seen in places like The Stop in Toronto (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011; Maharaj, 2020).

While many organizations have begun to offer cooking programs tailored to participants' specific language, ethnicity, and dietary needs, little research has been conducted that specifically examines the intersection of culture and equity within these food skills classes. My study examines what one CCS is attempting to do to engage people through this area.

Upon evaluating previous research about CCS, I noted that a gap exists examining the alignment of CCS program activities with potential impacts and the more significant contributions to social movements working towards more healthy and just food systems. At the same time, there is substantial anecdotal evidence of these possibilities, little empirical research about how CCS addresses overarching issues of food insecurity, poverty, and SDOH within their

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populations. My research does not mainly focus on this gap, but I wanted to note it. [More will be discussed in the Limitations of Research section on page 113]

Kitchens are a great promoter of connection through relationship building and learning together; CCS can be an incubator for much more than just food skills. Providing opportunities to honour different cultures can enable people to feel connected to others in their communities; making space to address equity issues can allow people to feel more at ease with others and circumstances within their lives.

Research Aims and Objectives

Through this research project, I aim to fill these gaps. I build on my own experience with organizations running CCS programming. I have cooked professionally for over twenty years and have spent much time volunteering for non-profit organizations and CCS, cooking with adults and children. Through these experiences, especially learning to cook wild game from Indigenous community members on the fly, I have seen the power of CCS.

Previous studies demonstrate that some CCS have taken measures to integrate cooking and food preparation with culture and equity, but many have done so in partial and siloed ways. I have chosen a social constructivism framework for this research, exploring patterns and meanings behind human behaviour within social situations (UCB, 2019; Amineh & Asl, 2015). This approach also considers the fluidity and complexity of food as part of an interconnected system. My research analyzes how objectives of cooking, culture and equity have been incorporated into CCS programming. Researching in this vein can clarify the opportunities for enrichment in CCS programming at R2H and highlight how other organizations involved in this work can broaden their scope to evolve and support the communities they serve. More specifically, my research explores how CCS are:

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1. using cooking as a tool to support the populations they serve;
2. integrating culture into their programming; and,
3. addressing issues of equity.

I have conducted qualitative research through a case study design using interviews with CCS participants and program facilitators at Roots to Harvest (R2H), a non-profit organization in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I chose this organization because its mandate is to build connections among people that have been disconnected from society. The organization introduced its mandate in *Forest Meets Farm*:

R2H uses food to create vibrant, inclusive spaces and meaningful experiences that build a positive sense of self and belonging in the diverse communities we work alongside.

Through growing food, cooking, and sharing meals, and building new skills, participants expand their ideas about community and begin to see themselves as an important part of the whole. Connecting food and people and community is at the core of our programming” (Roots to Harvest, 2018, p 7).

R2H aims to provide safe spaces for people to reconnect while gaining employable skills and certification and helping them build a positive self-image. In addition, R2H works to incorporate collective cooking with culture and equity within its CCS programs. Through this research, I evaluated the current successes and limitations of R2H’s activities, along with opportunities to enhance its programming. The research findings and subsequent recommendations will be valuable to the R2H and similar organizations that wish to broaden their reach within their communities concerning the objectives of cooking, culture, and equity in their CCS. This research also enriches current debates within public health and food studies

literature by explicitly interrogating the opportunities and challenges at the intersection of these three objectives for CCS.

Who Am I in This Research?

This thesis is being presented as part of a Master of Health Sciences degree. I identify as a white, upper-middle-class, straight, able-bodied female inhabitant of treaty land settler living in Thunder Bay, Canada. In addition, I hold certifications as a forester, a chef, and a nutrition manager, and I am also a mother, a writer, an empath, and a nature-lover.

My father's family has multigenerational French-Canadian roots in Quebec, emigrating from East Prussia in 1760, and my stepmother's family is from Netimizaagamig Nishnaabeg First Nation in northwestern Ontario. She and my grandmother have shared their family's stories of struggle and trauma stemming from colonialism's devastating effects. My mother's family emigrated from Britain, first to Hamilton in the 1960s, where she stayed to attend university, while the rest of her family moved to California. My stepfather's Irish-Finnish family has lived and farmed in northwestern Ontario for three generations. My four parents have all graduated from post-secondary education institutions and worked for governmental, non-governmental, educational, and community organizations. I would consider them to be activists in areas of social, environmental, governance, and advocacy. Through their differing cultural perspectives, they have all instilled strong justice-seeking ideals in me.

I grew up on a hobby farm in a small community outside of Thunder Bay, Ontario. My mother and stepfather raised livestock for meat, eggs, milk, and crops to feed them and supplement our family's freezer with a large vegetable garden and fruit trees. Our dinner tables were (and are still) always filled with fresh food from our farm, which my stepfather prides himself on. Conscious of our environmental footprint, our family practiced organic, sustainable

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farming techniques before it was cool; the farm's 45-year-old manure/compost pile is famous in the community. We all helped on the farm and were closely connected to and involved with the community where we lived. I spent many hours volunteering: with the local agricultural society, emergency services team, and various children's groups.

During my forestry work in remote parts of Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario, I realized that I would rather stay at the bush camp where I was living to help the camp cook rather than battle mosquitos and bears in the cut blocks to which I'd been assigned my work duties. In 2004, I returned to Thunder Bay to begin my culinary training, taking me to Paris, London, and more bush camps (but this time, as the cook). Since that time, I have owned and operated my own catering business and cooked at and managed several other local kitchens and food service operations. I have also worked in public health, increasing northern families' access to fresh produce and teaching kids that making and eating healthy food can be fun.

Now that I have a family of my own, I have continued donating my time, mainly cooking and teaching, for non-profit organizations like R2H, the Hymers Agricultural Society, local emergency shelters, and my child's elementary school. I think it is uplifting (and a lot of fun!) to give back to the community that has supported us. I have also supported equity work in the community: the Indigenous Food Circle, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy², and formerly with my work in public health.

Though I have had a privileged upbringing, I have also experienced trauma from suicide, abuse, mental wellness issues, and substance misuse in those close to me. From those experiences, I have gained strength, introspection, intuition, and the ability to read people well.

² The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy promotes a healthy, just, and sustainable food system in the Thunder Bay area (see <http://tbfoodstrategy.com/>).

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In my life, though I have been a single parent and have, at times, worked three jobs, I have never experienced absolute poverty, food insecurity, or racism in any significant capacity. However, I have known the struggles of people who have, and feel very empathetic toward them, which I believe situates me to undertake research connecting cooking, culture, and equity. I embark on this project to further my journey into being a chef-activist, to work toward a healthy and just food system for all.

Outline of the Thesis

In the following chapters, I present my thesis research. In the Literature Review, I describe scholarly literature on CCS and how taking part in these programs can affect participants and communities. Specifically, I looked at the intersection of culture and equity with cooking and how they fit into CCS programming. I found that cooking together has positively affected participants by reducing social isolation, increasing household food security, and building positive self-worth. Also, participation in CCS allows for passing on traditional cultural food practices, learning about new cultures, and the potential for civic engagement.

The Methodology and Methods chapter details how I conducted my case study with R2H with community-based research (CBR), using social constructivism to explain my approach. The intersection of these frameworks allowed me to study how knowledge and experiences are constructed and situated within group settings. I then provide details on case study research generally and outline my rationale for choosing this methodology. Next, I present R2H, the subject of my case study, gleaning specifics about organizational goals, background information, and CCS programming from publicly available data such as webpages, annual reports, and news articles. I then speak to how I gathered my research data, interviewing four R2H staff members and five CCS program participants and reviewing organizational material,

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including program evaluations, publications, and recalling my own volunteer experience. After presenting data collection methods, I report on my data analysis using thematic analysis, examining the collected data to identify common themes and patterns of meaning. Also, in this chapter are details about research ethics considerations and how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affected my research plans and execution.

The Findings chapter presents how and what individuals learned within group interactions in CCS programming regarding teachings of culture and equity, woven into cooking skills classes. Here, I explain how R2H incorporates cultural teachings into its programming and navigates cultural lines in northwestern Ontario. My data analysis shows the importance of connection as the primary goal for this CCS; participants describe R2H's CCS as human-centred, not food-centred. Regarding unpacking equity in CCS programming, I present information on how R2H addresses equity and socio-economic barriers CCS participants face and explain that R2H is interested in developing more programming and efforts around social advocacy.

The Discussion chapter dives further into what the meaning of the data. Specifically, I focus on how program participants feel R2H has become vital to them through expressions of feeling recognized and validated for who they are. I also point to areas that R2H might consider enriching their programming, such as doing more work to teach about and encourage social justice within their CCS programming,

This research contributes to the literature by emphasizing the possibilities of participating in CCS contributing to individual and collective belonging, wellbeing and social connectedness. Also, this research presents information on the transfer of food knowledge and its impact on cultural teachings. Teaching about culture through food is accessible to many people and can help bridge gaps between different cultures and generations of the same

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culture. Further, I describe R2H as a social gastronomy enterprise that uses food to engage people and encourage interest in social justice issues. This research can help to enhance the evolving field of social gastronomy literature.

I hope to continue working with these initiatives with a more mindful and deliberate approach to culture and equity, especially advancing Indigenous food sovereignty and dignified food access. I took on this research to enhance my knowledge and experience and contribute to the scholarly literature by exploring how non-profit organizations using food-based programming encourage members to explore and celebrate their culture and advocate for a healthy and just food system. Other organizations involved in similar work can learn from the opportunities and challenges presented in this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The introduction chapter set the stage for my research, presenting some context for my research question, objectives, and positionality. In this chapter, the literature review highlights what is currently known about CCS in the scholarly literature and how participation in these programs can benefit people, lessening the impacts of the SDOH present in their lives.

There are two main models of communal cooking facilities primarily found in practice and examined in academic research: Collective Kitchens and Community Kitchens. These two phrases have been used interchangeably in media and literature but generally refer to different models. Here, I briefly explain each, drawing on the scholarly literature, and then introduce and explain the term Collective Cooking Spaces (CCS) in my research. Thus, CCS is rooted in and builds on the Collective Kitchen and Community Kitchen models and literature.

In general, the term *Collective Kitchen* has been used to refer to a small group of people interested in sharing food preparation costs and labour pool their time, money, and skills to plan meals, shop for ingredients and prepare foods. These meals are then shared equally among the participants. Hwa Lee et al. (2010) differentiated Collective Kitchens from food banks, soup kitchens, and cooking classes by describing the group members' financial contributions and active participation in planning and preparing the food and the meals' division amongst the small group of participants, once finished.

A Collective Kitchen is adaptable depending on the needs of participants and involves people in meal planning, decision-making, and grocery shopping. Most often, participants are responsible for associated costs unless the group has secured outside funding. For example, *comedores populares* (Collective Kitchens) came about because of the economic crisis, and subsequent reforms have been effectively feeding hungry people in Peru since the early 1980s (Triplett, 2012).

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Collective Kitchens originated in Peru in the late 1970s when that country faced economic disaster (Gomez, 2005). Recent studies have shown food insecurity rates are still increasing in Peru, highlighted the continued need for collective kitchen models (Brewer et al. et al., 2021). Most successful operations involved Peruvian women organizing meals, bringing ingredients (from gardens or markets), cooking, and distributing food to local neighbourhoods. Since their inception, these initiatives have provided women with space to cook nutritious, accessible meals together and develop self-efficacy and confidence in their leadership and morale-building abilities (Immink, 2001; Blondet, 2004). As a result, these Peruvian women have also become well-known and respected in their communities, often feeling empowered and encouraged to tackle local social justice issues, including poverty and gender oppression (Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006).

Community Kitchen models also involve people preparing meals together. However, these initiatives generally focus on education and capacity-building among participants over merely making food and sharing costs and labour. Usually, ingredients for these meals are provided free of charge or at a small cost to the participants by a host organization. These organizations might seek funding from government agencies, foundations, or other fundraising efforts (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2005; Furber et al., 2010; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013). In these sessions, interested

A **Community Kitchen** is a multi-purpose kitchen space where different community members can gather to learn food skills and celebrate food while preparing nutritious, affordable meals for themselves or their families. Often, participants enjoy meals together, once completed, and take leftovers home. These spaces are usually part of larger organizations, such as community centres or other community-based social enterprises, which fund programs. An example of this model can be found in Community Food Centres Canada, part of a formal network of organizations, with thirteen across Canada, an example of which can be found in Winnipeg's North End neighbourhood (NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre, 2020).

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community members cook program-facilitated meals together while learning about accessing and preparing nutritious foods and local and regional resources and services. Once the meal is ready, everyone might sit down to eat as a group.

In this thesis, I use Collective Cooking Space (CCS) to describe an integration of the ideas and ideals from both Community Kitchen and Collective Kitchen models. As I reviewed the literature and learned more about my case study, I felt that neither model alone fully incorporated the principles I wanted to convey. In this research, CCS refers to kitchen spaces located within neighbourhoods or organizations driven by and for the needs and assets of a specific population.

CCSs are kitchen models using food to engage people and build community and inclusivity through education and employment opportunities. Some CCS encourage participants in civic engagement and social justice advocacy work.

These CCS often help people's immediate food needs while also providing connection, learning, and understanding of issues of specific populations or communities. These communities may include, for example, people living in poverty, new or lone parents, immigrants, seniors, students (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999). Situated between first-level food organizations (e.g., emergency food providers, like food banks and soup kitchens) and third-level agencies (e.g., those that lobby governments and policy decision-makers), CCSs are classified as second-level food organizations, which help to build capacity through strength-based approaches to learning (Fano et al., 2004).

A **strength-based approach** refers to the idea that everyone possesses competencies, assets, and resources, even if underutilized. This approach aims to help people realize, develop, and use these strengths to improve the quality of their lives (Saleebey, 2000).

Instead of viewing those who don't exhibit certain competencies as 'deficient' the value of a strength-based approach recognizes that people may

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not yet have had the opportunity to discover their strengths and put them to use (Rudolph & Epstein, 2000).

CCSs host participatory programs, providing community members with the opportunity to engage in facilitated workshops designed to augment food literacy and hands-on skills in children and adults (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2005; Engler-Stringer, 2006). For example, The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto, Ontario, offers weekly and bi-weekly cooking classes to suit various needs, including Spanish language speakers, BIPOC learners, and a men's cooking group (The Stop Community Food Centre, 2019).

These practical and food literacy skills can help people access nutritious foods by selecting (and sometimes growing) nutrient-dense, cost-effective ingredients and learning how to prepare those ingredients in family-friendly, healthy ways (Hwa Lee et al., 2010; Furber et al., 2010). In addition,

Food literacy can be defined as a positive relationship resulting from food experiences centring around social, environmental, cultural themes that can encourage participants to make decisions that align with their health goals (Cullen, Hatch, Martin, Higgins, & Sheppard, 2015).

these spaces might also promote self-sufficiency by hosting cooking programs, launching food-based businesses, and encouraging participants to get involved in social justice initiatives. Some examples from the literature include Peruvian women feeling empowered to take on domestic violence issues in their communities and The Stop Community Food Centre's community agriculture program in Toronto, Ontario (Immink, 2001; Levkoe, 2006; Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2006).

In the following subsections, I tease out some of the recognized benefits and challenges of specific CCS programs from the scholarly literature. As a starting point, I re-read articles and text from the reading list of the Canadian Food Systems: Critical Perspectives in Health and

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Sustainability class I took in 2019. Some of the topics covered in class helped broaden my knowledge base and narrow down my research focus, including governmental and community responses to food insecurity and frameworks and initiatives to encourage sustainable food systems and food justice. Then, I followed up with interesting titles found from citations within those articles and book chapters. In addition, I drew research inspiration from notes I had taken at several conferences I had attended that centred on exploring issues and developing practical solutions to national and global food issues: Resetting the Table, FSC's 10th Assembly (Food Secure Canada, 2017), Food Justice Summit, From the Ground Up: Unearthing Root Causes (Stagetime Productions, 2019), Just Food: Because It's Never Just Food (ASFS, 2021). I also searched for relevant journal articles and texts through Lakehead University's library website search function and Google Scholar. I browsed the web for news articles and websites of organizations running similar CCS programs.

The following subsections provide examples from these CCS programs; each section synthesizes the benefits and challenges from the different CCS models, combined with both advantages and deficiencies found in the literature. I have identified three key features of CCSs from this exploration and analysis: cooking, culture, and equity.

Cooking

One in eight working families in Canada falls below the poverty line, restricting their ability to access fresh, nutritious food (PROOF, 2020b; Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). In 2017, Statistics Canada reported that 4.4 million Canadians had experienced some degree of food insecurity over the past twelve months, which was a higher estimate than had ever been reported before (Statistics Canada, 2017a). People living in rural, remote, northern, or Indigenous communities are far more likely to be food insecure, and BIPOC households are shown to have

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disproportionately increased rates of food insecurity (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). Poverty restricts choices, purchasing, and food utilization, often causing people to forgo family favourites or cultural preferences, compromising quality and nutrition (Fafard St. Germain & Tarasuk, 2018). In addition to many families not having regular access to healthy, affordable options, a lack of time and awareness of preparing nutritious meals with inexpensive, raw ingredients impedes cooking at home (Lichtenstein, 2010; Maharaj, 2020). Compared with eating food from restaurants or pre-packaged convenience foods, meals made at home tend to be more cost-effective and nutritious, with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables (Mills et al., 2017; Reicks et al., 2018). In addition, studies have shown that confidence in participants' cooking abilities and knowledge increase with cooking at home and positive dietary changes. (Reicks et al., 2018). However, with many families resorting to nutritionally deficient, "pseudo foods" typically high in sugar, salt, and fat and generally low in nutrients essential for good health (Winson, 2017), cooking from scratch increasingly falls by the wayside.

Winson (2017) argues that we are all disconnected for different and similar reasons concerning political and economic determinants in the global food system. Up to a generation ago, food was primarily produced on farms and sold within the community, if not consumed onsite. It is only recently that industrialized capitalism has become more prominent in corporate food environments, where food items produced miles away are displayed and sold. This food system industrialization has created a disconnect between producers and consumers, shifting food consumption patterns and choices. Instead of growing their food or buying from local producers, people are consuming mass-produced, mass-marketed, nutritionally deficient "pseudo foods" (Winson, 2017).

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Research shows that people who lack food preparation skills are more likely to eat meals outside the home or choose convenience or highly processed foods over staple foods requiring more time, skill, and care to prepare (Soliah et al., 2011). In addition, restaurant or convenience meals tend to be lower in nutritional value as opposed to meals produced at home, leading to poor health outcomes such as an increased risk of heart disease, gastrointestinal cancers, strokes, and Type 2 diabetes (Soliah et al., 2011; Veeraraghavan et al., 2016). Pollan (2014) argues that relying on large corporations to produce these convenience and fast foods destroys a vital link to the web of social and ecological relationships that surround us: with plants and animals, the soil, producers, our history, and culture, and, of course, the people for whom we cook.

It has been shown that cooking is an excellent example of 'learning to do by doing' or knowledge production through an activity (Trubek & Belliveau, 2009). Hands-on instruction is also an effective method of combining formal and informal education and training with experiential learning. For example, nurse practitioner students at Georgetown University studying the impacts of culture on childbirth practice were responsible for describing common traditions, beliefs, and ideas of a selected cultural group. Along with literature and interviews supporting these customs, the students were asked to research, prepare, and photograph food prescriptions and preparations related to childbirth (Farley & Jacobwitz, 2019). This type of experiential learning helped the students better understand and identify with things they were learning. For example, research projects in elementary schools in Australia and New Orleans have shown that participation in cooking programs has positively impacted children's ability to learn, social behaviours, and comprehension of food systems (Cutter-Mackenzie, 2009; Fakharzadeh, 2015).

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Lived experiences provide deep connections between body and mind, emotions and meaning (Farley & Jacobwitz, 2019). There is a marked improvement in people's understanding, opinions and actions toward cooking when cooking demonstrations are included in hands-on cooking classes (Levy & Auld, 2004). This kind of experiential learning in the kitchen has benefits that improve the understanding of cooking and food preparation; the kitchen environment can be an optimal setting for first-hand, practical knowledge of many subjects including nutrition, economics, biology, ecology, history, and political science (Trubek & Belliveau, 2009). For instance, planning a Syrian menu for a community feast can include lessons on creating a nutritionally balanced meal and costing of the ingredients, in addition to teachings of the food's make-up and country's history.

Soliah et al. (2011) suggest that learning food preparation skills encourages people to prepare meals from fresh ingredients, provides a sense of personal accomplishment, and teaches the ability to evaluate food choices when eating outside the home. Here, the authors argue that people who participate in cooking classes are more apt to implement changes to their dietary intake than those who were not provided cooking instruction.

Belonging. American chef-activist Alice Waters, who is known for pioneering the farm-to-table movement highlighting the use of local ingredients and sustainable practices, has said, “the kitchen is a place where you can find something inside of you that you did not know was there” (quoted in Maharaj, 2020). In my personal experience cooking professionally and teaching cooking classes to people of all ages for the past twenty years, I have found kitchens to be spaces where people have often been able to discard old perceptions of themselves. They see themselves in new ways, gaining confidence through food preparation, cooking, and sharing knowledge with others. Through this sharing space, knowledge, and time, CCS participants have

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been able to grow, increasing their self-worth and sense of belonging. The literature confirms that cooking in group settings has been shown to have many additional benefits, including increased connection and acceptance, informal learning, as participants share tips and tricks amongst themselves in casual conversation and peer-assisted learning (Engler-Stringer, 2006).

Learning About Culture In CCS

Food is an entry point to connecting people across traditions, identities, experiences and places. Further, meal preparation rituals are intrinsically grounded in many different cultures. Farley and Jacobwitz (2019) argue that all ages and abilities can contribute to procuring and preparing ingredients or serving meals, whether gathering ingredients, peeling produce, or setting the table. Certain foods and preparation methods can be honoured and are often expressions of meaningful familial customs (Farley & Jacobwitz, 2019; Hand & Kaiser, 2019). For instance, Somali Bantu seeking refuge in the United States have found healing from oppression and trauma and connection to their heritage by participating in community gardens and food preparation programs (Hand & Kaiser, 2019).

Food is central to culture and fundamental to ethnic identity and preservation (Twiss, 2007; Amone, 2014; Farley & Jacobwitz, 2019). For example, Amone (2014) presents research emphasizing the strength of Ugandan staple foods such as millet, plantain, and cassava root, providing a sense of inclusion and stability of culture and ethnic identity within the country. Traditional food knowledge maintains cultural identity and encompasses ethnic traditions of sharing food and food practices across generations and geography (Kwik, 2007). This author demonstrates that this traditional food knowledge can follow people as they relocate to different areas globally, connecting “social diasporas” when passed down through generations. Kwik also

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argues that this knowledge can dwindle over time if not transmitted to younger generations, resulting in loss of cultural heritage.

Many Indigenous cultures have a deep connection to their Traditional land. McMahon (2018) suggests that the commonly accepted definition of “Indigenous” refers to being born in a specific place and that traditional food systems are rooted in these same places. Royal (2005) suggests that the concept of indigeneity can be expanded to include a worldview that sees human beings as part of, or unified with, the natural world and not superior to it. To further this point, Levkoe et al. (2019) state that Indigenous foodways should consider political, social, economic, and spiritual intersections with the land to be equitable and just.

Bodirsky and Johnson (2008) explain that the Indigenous ideals of reciprocity and respect for the natural environment are passed down through storytelling. They discuss legends that reveal the Creator has taught the older siblings (the plants, animals, and elements) to feel compassion for their younger brothers and sisters (the humans) and has instructed the natural elements to show the humans how to live well and peaceably with their surroundings, ethically and sustainably. These teachings form the basis of Indigenous ways of knowing that the natural world ("all our relations") is interconnected, has spirit and consciousness, and should be celebrated and protected (Bodirsky & Johnson, 2008). Maori scholar Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal (2005) sums up this Indigenous worldview by stating that all life is interwoven because everything is born from the earth. Therefore, life should be lived consciously within this tapestry.

However, the violent separation of Indigenous people from their land by colonial actions has fractured strong cultural connections, traditional beliefs, and food systems strengthened previously by generations of practice. Colonial efforts have resulted in the alienation,

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racialization, and marginalization of Indigenous people to this day, leading to the statement that food has long been weaponized (Lee et al., 2003). Indigenous people have sustained centuries of ethnocide, including state-supported starvation, at the hands of the Canadian Government (Daschuk, 2019).

Involvement in CCS among Indigenous youth has been shown to play an important role in reconnecting participants with their stolen culture, community, and language while healing from sustained trauma (Baskin, 2008; Neufeld et al., 2017; Sherman & Dooley, 2017). In response to this reality, the Sioux Chef, Sean Sherman, created a foundation, North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS), to promote Indigenous foodways education. Sherman has recently opened the Indigenous Food Lab in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a professional Indigenous kitchen and training centre based on pre-contact foods and Indigenous traditions.

As described in the introduction, due in part to the time and economic constraints and faced by many, food knowledge and skills are seldom practiced and passed down, as in generations past, leading to some individuals feeling lonely and searching for ancestral roots and identity (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Neufeld et al., 2017; Hand & Kaiser, 2019). CCSs in neighbourhoods worldwide can facilitate people gathering to prepare healthy meals, connect with others, learn new skills while sharing recipes and stories, and reconnect with their cultural heritage (Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Hand & Kaiser, 2019). For example, Cutter-Mackenzie (2009) conducted a study in which a high-needs elementary school in Australia implemented food gardening and cooking programs to introduce culturally focused ecological education to their school community. As a result, participating students, who were primarily from migrant and refugee families, felt a greater sense of pride and belonging within their new community, in

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addition to learning about different cultures, environmental issues, food systems, all while practicing English.

In the same vein, some innovative CCS models have implemented programming to connect recent immigrants to Canada and new neighbourhoods. These programs help transition people to their new homes, supporting the newcomers in relocating and adapting to their culture and families. This adaptation is accomplished partially by creating space for preparing traditional recipes from their homelands with ingredients found in their new localities (Hughes, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Hand & Kaiser, 2019). An example of this can be found in Hand and Kaiser's (2019) research with Somali Bantu refugees in the United States. People found connections to others and their cultures while being a part of community gardening and cooking programs. Also, The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto offers several culturally specific drop-in groups, such as Spanish language cooking programs and the "Just a Pinch of Soul" group, aimed at the diverse population in their neighbourhood (Levkoe, 2011; The Stop Community Food Centre, 2020).

Another consideration of the role of culture and food is in elevating gender equality. An example of this can be found in the communal kitchens in Peru, where participants began discussing the cultural prevalence of inequalities between Peruvian men and women. As the women became more comfortable and felt more confident in their abilities, they began to discuss women's health issues, rights, and duties, pushing back against imbalanced cultural norms. Marching and protesting at local and national levels, the ill-treatment of women led to the emancipation of Peruvian women, who were seen as social leaders within their communities (Blondet, 2004).

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In summary, food can play a valuable role in connecting people to their cultures while teaching more about the places they live. Traditional food knowledge is passed down through generations and across migration paths, welcoming people wherever they land. An expression of ethnic identity, food can help preserve traditions and culture as people move around the globe. Conversely, cooking together has also been a jumping-off point for changing and evolving cultural practices, leading to empowerment and gender equality. In this manner, cooking together in CCS can help alleviate feelings of displacement and disconnection.

Just Food: What is Meant by Equity

In addition to teaching and connecting people, food can be used as a tool to speak to and address broader, systemic issues of justice and equity, highlighting the conventional social and political climate of the region (Levkoe, 2006). Cadieux and Slocum (2015, p.1) write that “food justice” and “food sovereignty” are often presented as concepts that are more aligned with equitable, just food systems, opposite to capitalistic industrialized food systems; the authors ask, “what makes an actual food project serve food justice?” (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015, p. 1) They argue that equitable food systems involve people working to affect systems-level changes while acknowledging and addressing power imbalances.

Lang & Barling (2012) further suggest that genuinely understanding and working to change systemic barriers responsible for food insecurity, health inequities, and other injustices is key to creating just, sustainable food systems (see also CFCC, 2020). The strain from social, environmental, and health factors on food supply can be mitigated through this work. Levkoe (2017) addresses opposition to these social and ecological consequences and capitalism through social action and collaborative food networks, namely alternative food initiatives (AFI). AFIs, loosely, encompass autonomous food initiatives that are borne from necessity. Challenges faced

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by communities are seen as opportunities to promote education and connection to food systems and policy and infrastructure change. Some AFIs include CCS programs, community gardens, food sovereignty movements, and dignified food access (Levkoe, 2017).

Income, education, housing, ethnicity, gender, social-connectedness, and the links between the environment and people's wellbeing are all elements of SDOH and factors contributing to health inequities. Many individuals are impacted by these social and ecological effects, which are evident in their daily lives. The Canadian Public Health Association (2019) describes health inequities among Canadians along a social gradient: those with lower income generally have poorer health outcomes than those with higher household income. This discrepancy also extends to individuals' ability to access additional health determinants, such as food, housing, education, and other essential resources. Experiencing food insecurity is often associated with poverty. More specifically, it relates to lone-parent families, low-income households, and people who rent (not own) their homes (Tarasuk & Vogt, 2009). In BIPOC populations, children, newcomers, and residents of rural and remote communities, these inequity rates are disproportionately higher than are found in the general population (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). Also, food insecurity and nutritionally deficient diets have been linked to numerous adverse health outcomes, such as certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, and Type 2 diabetes (Veeraraghavan et al., 2016; Hunger + Health, 2020; Fournier et al., 2019; Adams et al., 2019). In addition, for BIPOC communities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, SDOH also include continued exposure to intolerance and discrimination, both historical and current (Government of Canada, 2012).

Because the theme of equity is complex, I discuss several sub-themes pertinent to my research - decolonization, advocacy work, diversity and inclusion, and social support. Although

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these themes are discussed separately, these factors and forces are highly interconnected in practice and community.

Decolonization. The control of food and its production is crucial to the control of a population. Weaponizing food by ruining crops, farmlands, and food supplies has been a tactic of warfare and ideologies between nations for centuries (Lee et al., 2003). For example, owing to the colonial actions of cultural genocide, "manifest destiny" (Pratt, 1927), and governmental discrimination, almost 99% of the arable farmland in the United States is owned by white people; "food apartheid" is experienced exorbitantly by people of colour in that country (Penniman, 2020). In Canada, similar colonial history and resultant poor outcomes are true of BIPOC, where that population is disproportionately more vulnerable to food insecurity (Willows et al., 2011; PROOF, 2014). This disparity is linked directly to historical and continued inequality, poverty, and access to land faced by BIPOC.

As alluded to above, food has been used as a tool of dehumanization and extermination against Indigenous people by the Canadian government (McMahon, 2018; Owen, 2019; Daschuk, 2019). For example, to coerce Indigenous inhabitants to move from their traditional lands to government-appointed reserves, Canadian officials withheld food from the people after systematically criminalizing many culturally relevant, traditional food practices (Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Daschuk, 2019). Canadian Residential schools were also intentionally underfunded by the federal government, barely providing enough food for students and essentially forcing starvation on the children (Owen, 2019). In many instances, students were forced to eat food that was "rancid, full of maggots, [and] stink," with one survivor noting that hunger was never absent in these schools (Mosby & Galloway, 2017, p.1).

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Recently, Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) movements aiming to achieve healing, health, and food security by "decolonizing the table" (McMahon, 2018) have become prominent with the hope of empowering Indigenous people to reclaim their stolen culture and land after centuries of oppression (Dietler, 2006; McMahon, 2018). The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (2020) describes IFS as a participatory "policy-driven-by-practice" approach to address systemic issues drawing on traditional Indigenous knowledge, values, and wisdom connecting food, language, culture, and health to the land. IFS recognizes the importance of self-determination and responsible environmental stewardship in reclaiming pre-contact practices of hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, and sharing practices (Desmarias et al., 2011; McMahon, 2018; Levkoe et al., 2019). Indigenous food systems are inseparably tied to the land, including soil, air, water, and all living species found in the natural environment; food and land are at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous (Food Secure Canada, 2012). Many Indigenous peoples across Canada and worldwide honour worldviews maintaining the interconnectedness of the natural world with the human world, meaning that what affects the environment also affects the human population (Royal, 2005). Historically, natural resource extraction has happened on Indigenous lands, without meaningful consultation with local communities, propagating the "Resource Curse" (Parlee, 2015). The Resource Curse describes the tendency of the natural resource extraction industry to prosper while surrounding Indigenous communities suffer social and environmental ramifications from development. Discussions surrounding resource extraction planning and implementation have often left Indigenous people feeling tokenized and misrepresented (Lewis, 2020), leading to further tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

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For inhabitants of treaty land interested in decolonizing their approach to reparation and reconciliation with Indigenous populations, recognizing the intrinsic value of land to Indigenous people is critical. The authors explain that traditional food and land holds spiritual significance to Indigenous ceremony, often centred around feasting, an important means of giving thanks, memorializing loved ones, or celebrating. For many Indigenous cultures, traditional food is seen as medicine; it and the land from which it comes are sacred gifts bestowed upon them by a divine entity (Shukla et al., 2019).

To help promote equitable relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, especially when the use of traditional lands is in question, Mi'kmaq Elder Dr. Albert Marshall advocates for Two-Eyed Seeing. This approach supports “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledge and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all,” (Reid et al., 2020). By balancing the two worldviews with a two-eyed lens, fair, equitable relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be established and maintained.

Despite centuries of oppression, Indigenous peoples have demonstrated remarkable resilience through continued actions to heal through decolonizing their food systems and rejuvenating their traditional lands (Levkoe et al., 2019; Shukla et al., 2019). A paper by Shukla et al. (2019) entitled, “Nimíciwinán, nipimátisiwinán,” which translates to “our food is our way of life,” explores the role of food and land-based learning practices in revitalizing and maintaining the Manitoba community’s health, connection to culture and identity, and self-determination. Renowned Indigenous chefs such as Sean Sherman and Rich Francis support reconciliation by producing and promoting modern Indigenous cuisine (Sherman & Dooley,

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2017; Robb, 2019). In 2021, Sherman plans to open a not-for-profit Indigenous Food Lab in Minneapolis, MN, which will consist of a restaurant, and training centre prioritizing healing through learning Indigenous food curriculum, cooking, and sharing practices (Shawn Sherman, 2020).

Activism and advocacy work. CCS can help build communities' capacity through education about and advocacy for policies addressing issues such as poverty, food insecurity, and poor health (Community Food Centres Canada, 2018). Capacity building and empowerment of CCS participants can happen by learning new skills, leading to elevated self-worth and increased health and well-being of themselves and their communities (Community Food Centres Canada, 2018).

However, there has been debate on whether CCS participation increases household food security, as only nominal amounts of food are prepared during each session. Heightened food security is often impacted by increased household income; the CCS programs previously studied have not been shown to increase participants' income levels directly (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2005). While participation in CCSs is not seen as a long-term food insecurity solution (Wakefield et al., 2012), participants in such programs have reported feeling less stress knowing they contribute to their household's food stores. Also, participants have said that preparing and bringing CCS program food into the household is more dignified than receiving food hampers or meals from an emergency shelter (Radimer et al., 1990; Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2005, 2006, 2007a). From Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum (2007a), I draw an example from qualitative research conducted in Saskatoon, Montreal, and Toronto. Study participants spoke of dignity, quality and acceptability of food when comparing food received from food banks to the food they made in CCS programs. Participants described increased

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variety, suitability, and freshness levels of food they prepared in CCSs over food received in hampers. The people studied also expressed how much they appreciated having fresh items instead of non-perishable foods generally given in hampers (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2007a).

Household food security can be temporarily enhanced due to prepared meals brought home and knowledge of budgeting shared amongst participants. For instance, in the same study mentioned above conducted across Toronto, Montreal, and Saskatoon, CCS participants reported that since participating in the cooking programs, their household diets had increased in variety, including fresh produce and meat over using canned and other shelf-stable foods (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2007a). However, it is unlikely that community or regional food insecurity will be adequately addressed through participation in CCS, as broad changes must be made to intact systems and obstructions (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2006; Wakefield et al., 2012). Some community organizations offer social services and various food provision programs in higher needs neighbourhoods to fill urgent needs (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011). Scholars have criticized these and other extra-governmental, charitable food provision programs for ineffective addressing systemic community food insecurity, resulting from inequity and poverty (Wakefield et al., 2012). Dachner and Tarasuk (2017) agree and propose that continuing emergency food programs appear to absolve federal and provincial governments of any policy responsibility explicitly addressing food insecurity. However, CCSs are positioned to increase community awareness of local issues, providing food and preparation skills to alleviate immediate food insecurity; decreasing participants' need to access emergency food programs has been shown to increase their dignity. Elevating CCS participants' dignity occurs when they can

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choose foods their family will eat instead of simply receiving food that isn't liked or appropriate and may go to waste (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2007b).

To adequately promote just, healthy food systems, regional and community food strategies that help people help themselves are required, including encouraging people to advocate for themselves and their communities (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2012; Maharaj, 2020). CCSs are part of a grassroots movement to accomplish this as they provide formal and informal education and training to participants in safe, inclusive spaces (Immink, 2001; Hwa Lee et al., 2010, Fano et al., 2004). In 2012, The Stop in Toronto launched a national level network of Community Food Centres (CFC), supporting people through various food-based and education programs; this model has now been expanded into thirteen organizations across the country. CFCs offer programming to help people learn and build skills in CCS from community experts and each other while empowering them through support and training to become involved in issues that affect their lives (Community Food Centres Canada, 2018; Wakefield et al., 2012). Some CCSs have fostered social justice movements focused on sustainable food systems, as well as dismantling systemic barriers to addressing poverty, food insecurity, and the continued effects of colonialism (Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006; Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2006; Levkoe, 2006; Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011). For example, in the 1980s, Community Kitchens in Peru gained the reputation of being environments where the participants felt empowered to work together against poverty, food insecurity, and other local issues (Schroeder, 2006; Immink, 2001). The Community Kitchen movement gained momentum in that country, teaching Peruvian women transferable skills, including food preparation and safety, budgeting, time management, leadership, organizational, and entrepreneurial proficiency (Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006). Encouraged by increased self-esteem, group members

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assumed leadership roles within these kitchen groups. They were eventually recognized as activists in non-food-related issues within their communities (Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006). As such, the beginning of social activism within organized community kitchens was increased. As a direct result of contributing to their families' and communities' health and wellbeing and learning viable leadership skills, these group members' self-worth and confidence grew, improving their positions within their households and communities. These activists took the initiative to affect local social justice movements. An example of this concept from the global north exists in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Chef Sean Sherman has focused on revitalizing Indigenous foods and food systems within the modern culinary world. He has learned traditional farming, foraging and preparing pre-contact foods and teaches these topics in the Indigenous Food Lab. The IFL supports Indigenous youth in learning about their heritage, promoting Indigenous foodways, increasing access to traditional foods, and healing. To this point, Sean Sherman has said, "Reclamation of ancestral education is a critical part of reversing the damage of colonialism and forced assimilation, and food is at the heart of this reclamation" (NATIFS, 2019).

Social gastronomy. Nineteenth-century chef Auguste Escoffier is referred to as the founder of modern cuisine: "the king of chefs and the chef of kings" (Myhrvold, 2019). Escoffier has been hailed as a visionary, streamlining processes, introducing hygiene practices, and improving working conditions for kitchen workers. He is also credited with introducing social gastronomy as a concept - envisioning people of different social classes sitting at the same table, sharing a meal and conversation (King, 2019; Disciples Escoffier International, 2020). Mixing social classes was a progressive idea from one who cooked for French high society in the early 1900s. The initial concept of social gastronomy has not changed much since 1903. However, the

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modern phrase is generally attributed to social entrepreneur William Drayton, referring to using the power of food to improve the lives of vulnerablized people and generate social change (Navarro-Dols & González-Pernía, 2020; Ashoka, 2020). Organizations involved in this work collaborate with regional agencies, businesses, and individuals to tackle more significant systemic issues within the context of their local communities through things like employment-focused kitchen training, entrepreneurial counselling, and nutrition classes (Gastromotiva, 2021; Diaz, 2021).

In the last fifteen years, social gastronomy has caught the attention of the culinary community and the media, with "movements" and "societies" popping up all over the globe, using food as a conduit for change: helping to fight poverty and poor health, empower people, and affect systemic and policy change (Navarro-Dols & González-Pernía, 2020). Social gastronomy organizations use a multi-sector collaborative approach to tackle inequities in the food system (Diazhwa, 2021). However, there has not been much written from an academic position on the organizations involved in this work.

Diversity and inclusion. Reese (2020) argues that organizations interested in diversity and inclusion conversations should engage a broad spectrum of perspectives, viewpoints, and backgrounds. The author contends that systemic racism and oppression should not be tolerated or ignored but should be addressed head-on through education and policy changes. However, simply having a blanket statement referencing inclusion and respecting all differences is not enough to effectively eradicate oppressive structures and biases that marginalize people. For example, in the non-profit sector, many boards of directors and organizational leadership teams are predominantly white settlers, despite the diverse populations they work with (Walker, 2019). This discrepancy emphasizes the importance of prioritizing ethnic and racial equity

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within non-profit governance structures. For these organizations, remaining relevant and continuing to make a difference in the lives of others is heavily reliant on their willingness to adapt and engage people representative of a diverse collective society (Walker, 2019).

Social support. The literature demonstrates that CCS often provide opportunities for social support, stress reduction, and improved self-esteem and self-confidence (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2007). Social interaction in cooking programs encourages participants and facilitators to share experiences and information on food preparation or social service and health resources (Furber, Quine, Jackson, Laws, & Kirkwood, 2010). CCSs can be strategies for public health promotion to develop self-efficacy and resilience in those experiencing food insecurity and social exclusion as an alternative to emergency food relief dependence. Feeling safe, reducing social isolation, and accessing various supports were essential to program participants (Engler-Stringer & Berenbaum, 2005; Mundel & Chapman, 2010). Studies have found that these opportunities for social interactions and support for themselves and their families were the fundamental reasons participants joined CCSs (Crawford & Kalina, 1998; Fano, Tyminski, & Flynn, 2004). These studies suggest that CCSs built on participatory programming and offering social supports provide valuable opportunities for social interaction and support in people experiencing socio-economic challenges.

Despite these benefits, CCSs could play more of a role in fostering grassroots social justice movements through their food-based programming. People can take agency over their own lives in these spaces to deepen participants' understanding of food issues, become involved with food advocacy within their neighbourhoods and beyond, engage with community partners, and build advocacy, education, and communications skills to enhance their skills their life satisfaction. Community-initiated spaces encouraging participatory programs designed to

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augment food literacy and hands-on skills in children and adults would benefit many neighbourhoods. Participants would learn how to select (and sometimes grow) nutritious and cost-effective ingredients, cook healthy meals and connect with others. These spaces would also promote self-sufficiency by offering cooking programs, launching food-based businesses, and encouraging participation in social justice initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the existing literature to describe sub-themes of culture and equity in a cooking program. I defined standard terms used in these sources and proposed my own, CCS, to explain integrating those models, incorporating education, employment, and advocacy efforts.

The literature studied showed how CCS programs could benefit participants and improve SDOH regarding people's health and wellbeing, especially in reducing social isolation, improving immediate food security, and educating participants on food-based topics. I provided examples from the literature to explain how food preparation can be used as a platform to combine subjects such as culture and equity into CCS programming. I then detailed why including information like this is vital in CCS programming and presented the concepts of decolonization, advocacy work, social gastronomy, diversity, and inclusion.

In reading the literature, I noted that not all of the kitchens studied included culturally tailored programming to their clientele, nor did many of them introduce advocacy or social justice work. I was left wondering why there was so much difference in program delivery across the CCS. Also, though the literature touched on the positive impacts CCS participation had on relevant SDOH and individuals' ability to provide nutritious meals for themselves and their families, it would be helpful to have in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies that delved into

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these ideas more fully. Lastly, there have not been any academic studies on Roots to Harvest, though the organization has been in existence since 2007.

In the next chapter, I describe the methodology and methods used in this research. I introduce and expand upon the epistemological frameworks I applied and how they have been used in this case study. I then describe the case study site and detail the community-based research (CBR) conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

This chapter describes the methodology used in my research, specifically, the social constructivism framework used in my case study methods. I explain how I conducted my community-based study using interviews with Collective Cooking Space (CCS) participants and program facilitators to explore their perceptions on how Roots to Harvest (R2H) integrates culture and equity within their cooking programs. Also, I detail the background of R2H and why I chose to study this organization. I end the chapter by speaking to the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on decisions about my research.

Social Constructivism

Qualitative research focuses on finding the patterns and meaning behind human behaviour, perspectives, ideologies, and social interactions, from that human's perspective using non-numerical data (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Intending to gain insights into current CCS opportunities and challenges, my research analyzes how one CCS integrates cooking, culture, and equity and where there might be opportunities for improvement.

People construct reality in various ways as a product of mutual understanding. Social constructivism helps answer questions about *how we know things* by co-constructing knowledge through engagement, building relationships and sharing knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credited with developing the theory, Vygotsky argued that cognitive functions begin and are products of social interactions; learners, therefore, are integrated into the knowledge community (UCB, 2019). Through this framework, knowledge is constructed or developed through people's interactions with each other,

Social constructivism is instructive for my research because emerging concepts centre on an individual's narrative of learning taking place from shared interactions within a group, as

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opposed to solely using that individual's perceptions, based on the understanding of surrounding societal norms (Kim, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This shared understanding is based on participants' common interests and assumptions; the construction of reality, knowledge, and learning is based on this premise (Kim, 2010).

Engaging with participants through CBR and understanding their views of the CCS they are participating in is key to developing meaning from these interactions. It has been argued that lessening the distance between researcher and study participants (as with CBR) can mar data collection, introducing bias; proponents for CBR counter study participants possess inherent tenets and beliefs that can significantly enrich the learning environment and research (Halseth, Markey, Manson, & Ryser, 2016). I believe this latter statement to be true. Because of the limitations of the pandemic, I am drawing from my personal experiences volunteering with R2H CCS before COVID-19 closures, which allowed me to work alongside and develop relationships with the study participants. Though I did not know it at the time, immersing myself in the communication and collaboration taking place in the CCS greatly enhanced my later research. Unfortunately, during my interviews, public health restrictions prohibited me from further participation in the CCS as planned in my research. Had I not had the opportunity to get to know the R2H staff and CCS participants, I would not have had the insight and context to understand the richness and complexity of these connections as they pertained to my research. Though speaking with study participants while working with them in the CCS would have been ideal, communicating with them over email and Zoom was easier because of our prior working relationship.

The questions used in each interview allowed participants to recall details of their participation in classes and construct meaning around culture and equity within those learning

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situations. Because of the collaborative nature of food preparation, the kitchen is ideal for highlighting the strengths of learning and working together. Through this methodology, a researcher is viewed as part of the research. As the researcher and the participant co-construct the understanding of this knowledge, I kept mindful of my position within this project and any biases I may have harboured throughout this research process.

For this research, I interviewed five program participants from R2H's cooking classes to understand how they felt the programs involved engaging with aspects of culture and equity while in attendance. I also spoke with R2H's leadership team and staff members to understand their organizational objectives around culture and equity in the CCS. Many study participants agreed to have their names used within this research, and I have included direct quotes and a synthesis of the interviews in the following chapters.

Case Study Research

Remenyi et al. (2002) and Woodside & Wilson (2003) illustrate the importance of case study research for a fundamental understanding of procedures, concepts, and ideas. Heale and Twycross (2017) describe a case study as a method of investigating a group (in this matter) whereby the researcher studies in-depth data covering various variables to increase awareness and understanding by breaking down a large topic into manageable research foci. Utilizing qualitative data collected in a case study can assist the researcher in gaining in-depth insight into the organization's structure to be used as a learning tool for impact and future research (Heale & Twycross, 2017). This approach is an effective knowledge-generating strategy borne from storytelling. Zainal (2007) describes case study research as appropriate when the researcher wishes to understand social behaviour within groups, which I've chosen to do in this research.

To reiterate, my research objectives focus on how CCS are:

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1. using cooking as a tool to support the populations they serve;
2. integrating culture into their programming; and,
3. addressing issues of equity.

Using a community-based case study approach, I investigated how one CCS attempted to reach these objectives. My research explored the challenges that the R2H site has faced, the successes they have celebrated and has uncovered how these programs operate and connect to the three identified themes.

Roots to Harvest (R2H) - Thunder Bay, Ontario

R2H is a non-profit organization that aspires to use food as a conduit for change within individuals and communities. According to their website, "R2H uses food as a tool to connect people to one another, and build belonging and dignity through meaningful programs, initiatives, and advocacy" (R2H, 2020). Since its inception in 2007, R2H has offered employment opportunities, outreach, and education using food and growing as common denominators in a supportive environment. The organization believes that young people, whom they affectionately refer to as "Punks" (Roots to Harvest, 2018, p. 11), who feel connected and valued will be more resilient and better equipped to make healthy life choices, despite their situations. R2H gives their Punks agency to figure things out and the right tools to succeed.

R2H is situated in Thunder Bay, ON, the largest metropolitan area in northwestern Ontario, in the heart of the Boreal Forest. Despite being a central shipping hub located on the shore of Lake Superior, with the Trans-Canada highway and rail lines intersecting through the city, it's geographically isolated due to the distance from other major cities (see Figure 1). For example, Winnipeg is 700 kilometres to the west, and Toronto is approximately 1400 kilometres to the southeast. The number of frost-free days occurring between the beginning of June and the

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middle of September dictates the length of the farming season - usually about 106 (National Gardening Association, 2021) - but frosts have occurred almost every month of the year. Despite the variable weather conditions, the area has a prolific local food system, including successful producers of fresh produce, meat, eggs, dairy, baked goods, and preserves. Thunder Bay farmers' markets and online stores are active year-round and have remained a vital link to local foodways, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thunder Bay borders the Fort William First Nation and serves as a central hub for travel, education, and health care for many road-accessible and remote Indigenous communities in northwestern Ontario. The city is home to 107,909 people, with 12.7% of the population identifying as Indigenous, according to the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Of those 12.7%, 77% identify as First Nations people, with Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree ancestry; 20% identified as Metis; 3% responded with multiple Indigenous responses (Statistics Canada, 2020). Visible minorities, as defined by the Employment Equity Act, include people of colour other than Indigenous people (Legislative Services Branch, 2020) and make up 4.7% of Thunder Bay's population (Statistics Canada, 2020). In the City, racial tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens have been pervasive for many years, making national and international news headlines (Edwards, 2018; BBC News Services, 2021), and prompting multi-episodic podcasts (McMahon, 2021) and books (Talaga, 2017) to be written. Thunder Bay hosts newcomers from Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Syria and has the largest community of Finnish-descended Canadians outside of Finland (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Most of the City's residents are aged 15-64 years (65.1%), and the median gross income is \$34,455 per person. Almost fourteen percent of the City's total population earns less than the Canadian Low-Income

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Measure of \$24,000, which increases to 37% for Indigenous Peoples in Thunder Bay (Government of Canada, 2017).

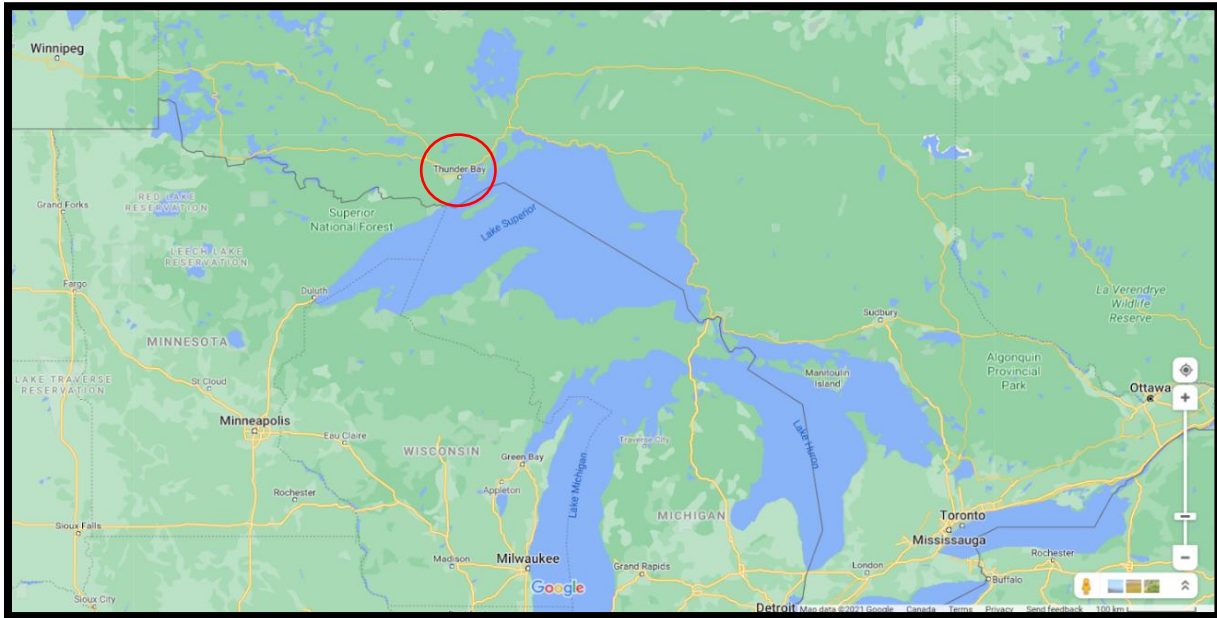


Figure 1. Location of Thunder Bay, Ontario (Google Maps, 2021)

Organizational goals and activities. From their multitude of community outreach programming, R2H sets these as organizational goals:

1. Respectfully building relationships with participants, community members, and other organizations in inclusive environments;
2. Offering opportunities for people to have positive experiences with food;
3. Tailoring programs for different groups, depending on the need.

R2H aims to help young people help themselves: earning high school credits, learning what's needed to start a food-based business, connecting with local chefs and kitchens, strengthening their resumes through skill-building activities and certifications. In addition to operating a CCS, R2H operates urban farms housing extensive vegetable gardens, rabbits, and quail, employing youth in various capacities over the summer and school year. Interested in

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community building, R2H actively promotes workshops and speaker series involving gardening, apiculture, composting, food security issues, ecological farming, seeds, youth employment, food literacy, social enterprise, strategies for engaging people through food and working in diverse communities.

Though one of the leadership team members is a registered dietitian, R2H does not set specific dietary guidelines for each session. Instead, the CCS teaches how to cook from scratch, using whole ingredients, including field trips to their urban farms or community partners, so participants better understand local food systems. R2H's most recent strategic plan (2019) shows the importance of their organization's recognition and acknowledgment of the Indigenous partners and land on which they live, work, and thrive, being inclusive of different people, space, and barriers, and acting on these issues that matter to them. R2H's underlying philosophy extends beyond being merely a charity model that provides food to hungry people. According to their mandate, the organization is attempting to address food systems issues, especially those at the core of food insecurity, by using food to address broader social issues of poverty, racism, and equity. When the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions shut down many organizations in the Thunder Bay region, R2H quickly pivoted to assembling and delivering emergency food hampers for students, seniors, Indigenous Elders, and newcomers, ensuring appropriate food in stomachs may have otherwise gone hungry. For example, culturally tailored food bags for Muslim families have included lentils, tahini, red pepper paste, and halal bouillon cubes. All supplemental food bags have included fresh fruit and vegetables.

Background information. To begin my research, I collected background information about R2H and their CCS. I examined publicly available information, including their website³,

³ <http://www.rootstoharvest.org/>

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social media⁴, *Forest Meets Farm* cookbook (Roots to Harvest, 2018), and articles written about the organization. Also, I reviewed additional information on the three cooking programs, including program reviews and participation evaluations, as well as annual reports and financial statements.

R2H's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and their "FunGM" were held on April 13th via Zoom, recapping 2020. The AGM included reviewing financial statements, the annual report, and introducing new board members. R2H received a substantial increase in funding from different governmental agencies and not-for-profit foundations. This increase allowed R2H to quickly shift from regular programming to preparing and distributing emergency food bags to students who had relied on school nutrition programs to supplement their food supply and offering culturally appropriate hampers to newcomer families. Also, during this time, R2H provided food for people distributed via regional organizations such as the Elizabeth Fry Society, Dew Drop Inn, and the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre. Because of the various public health restrictions and lockdowns of 2020, COVID-19 negatively impacted R2H's ability to fundraise or generate revenue from market and storefront sales.

The FunGM highlighted programs, volunteers, participants, and supporters and showcased upcoming plans, including a three-year development partnership with Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC).

CCS Programs

I began interviews with R2H staff to explore details about the organization's CCS programming. Cooking programs offered through R2H are developed based on a need or gap in the community. Before the pandemic halted most programming, R2H offered a range of cooking

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/rootstoharvest/> <https://twitter.com/roots2harvest?lang=en>
<https://www.instagram.com/rootstoharvest/> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfjkitRLJipwATqTyrmKWQw>

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programs, from where I drew my study participants. Below I provide an overview of the main programs offered.

Cooking for Cred. The urban garden programs at R2H are built around the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, a six-pillared strength-building approach to poverty reduction and social programming, helping people develop their assets and strengths to keep up and get ahead (Serrat, 2017). The most extensive cooking program offered at R2H, Cooking for Cred (C4C), is the only CCS program in the organization that fits this model. Funded through CFCC, C4C is focused on skills development and training for people under the age of 30 to enter employment. The program participants are registered in the Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment & Training Services (KKETS)⁵ and Lakehead Adult Education Centre (LAEC)⁶, earning co-operative credits toward their high school diplomas through C4C. The goals of C4C include having the students learn about food systems, basic food literacy skills, hands-on food preparation, and employability skills. To this end, students have taken field trips to R2H's urban gardens to dig vegetables later used in recipes they make in class. Local chefs (me included) have frequently come into the kitchen to lead sessions on knife skills, stretching food dollars, and making pasta from scratch. Funding support is provided for each student to obtain their safe food handling certification, which many opt to take to benefit future employment opportunities. Program statistics indicate that the number of participants enrolled in each session was 14 in 2019 and 12 in 2020. The number of participants who graduated from each session, earning co-op credits, was 10 in 2019 and 11 in 2020. Also, the number of participants who obtained safe food handling certification was 14 in 2019 and 9 in 2020.

⁵ KKETS is an Indigenous-led organization providing culturally appropriate training initiatives, education, and employment opportunities to empower people to succeed (see <http://www.kkets.ca/>)

⁶ LAEC is a division of the Lakehead Public School Board, offering high school credits through classes, e-learning, and cooperative education opportunities (see <https://www.lakeheadschoools.ca/adult-education/>).

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Culture Kitchen. Culture Kitchen (CK) was designed to reduce social isolation where newcomer women from Middle Eastern countries can feel more connected to Thunder Bay by meeting others in similar situations and cooking their familial recipes. The facilitator of the CK program, Airin Stephens, identifies as a white middle-class Canadian woman who has significant experience and comfort working with Muslim women. Her experience with the Toronto School Board training others in culturally relevant pedagogy helped develop the CK program at R2H.

After securing funding, R2H reached out to local language schools, LAEC and the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association (TBMA)⁷ to find Arabic translators who could work with R2H and the CK program. Connections were made through the Thunder Bay Masjid for program participant recruitment. Many of the CK women left school after grades four or five, while some did not attend school. Most were married in their early teen years, after which they stayed home exclusively to be homemakers, wives, and mothers, navigating the world only through going to their children's schools, grocery stores, or doctor's appointments. The women came from different backgrounds, and might not have mixed, had they not had the opportunity to come together at CK.

CK was initially planned to run for six weeks, offering three, three-hour sessions per week. Soon after the women got to know each other and the program, they asked for the sessions to be extended to four, four-hour weekly sessions that ran for eight weeks. At the beginning of the CK program, Airin asked the women about their prior cooking experiences and what they hoped to gain from their participation in the CCS. Most had spent years helping their mothers in the kitchen and had continued cooking for their own families. Airin told me at the

⁷ TBMA provides settlement services, including information, orientation, and referral services for immigrants and refugees to help transition to life in Canada (<http://www.thunderbay.org/>)

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beginning of CK that some of the women hated cooking and so “didn’t want to reduce the women exclusively to cooking.”

One of the program goals included practicing English vocabulary and conversational phrases in each class. For example, the women describe in English to the group what they made. Volunteers wrote down the women’s recipes, which was a new experience for them, as they had all learned to cook from memory. Another goal of CK was to help the women transition to live in Canada, including getting the women comfortable speaking with men who weren’t their husbands and having experiences independent of their home lives. CK programming also included having female guest chefs into lead sessions and talk about their experiences of being successful, educated, independent women working in kitchens, and in some cases, owning their own businesses. I volunteered with CK twice and hope to participate again!

After the eight weeks of in-class learning, the women practiced their new industrial kitchen-oriented organizational, English, and socialization skills when they planned and executed the CK Dinner Dash. The Dinner Dash offered a weekly dinner subscription, where community members would pick up a weekly meal for two (but it was often large enough for more) for six weeks. Each week, a different woman would plan a menu, write out recipes, and order ingredients to make 60 dinners. For example, one week’s menu included Arabic salad with a lemon-olive oil dressing, fatta badhnajan (grilled, stuffed eggplant), riz biryani (Indian-spiced rice), grilled potatoes, and riz bihalib (rice pudding). The Dinner Dash cooks would prepare and portion each meal, and the woman responsible for that week’s planning would speak with meal recipients (with the help of a translator, when needed) as they picked up their weekly food.

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Forest Meets Farm. R2H wanted to engage with experiential food literacy programming through a land-based teaching lens. Thus, stemming from a Greenbelt Foundation⁸ grant, Forest Meets Farm (FMF) was developed to focus on the intersection of foraged and cultivated place-based foods from the Boreal Forest region. According to the FMF cookbook, “FMF is a celebration of the wild and cultivated foods of Northern Ontario...With curiosity and respect, we have begun to explore the extensions of our local food systems beyond the farmer’s fields” (Roots to Harvest, 2018, p. 71). FMF was originally a series of workshops designed in collaboration with Matawa Education Department⁹ and Lakehead Public Schools to be presented to area high school students highlighting a seasonal approach to foraging, hunting and fishing, farming, and preserving food from the boreal forest region. While not a strictly Indigenous foods class, incorporating learning from local knowledge keepers and Indigenous Elders has been an essential pillar of FMF.

The program's goal was to address some of the Truth and Reconciliation Report Calls to Action, build good relationships with regional Indigenous communities, and provide opportunities for youth to learn from local knowledge keepers. First offered at local high schools, the program included field trips to an area fish hatchery and one of the R2H urban farms. Sessions also included ice fishing, jam making, and moose sausage making. Classroom teachers noted connections between FMF workshops and school curriculum in many ways, including links between food systems and geographies and traditional Ojibwe skills of harvesting and preparing foods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public high schools in the Thunder Bay

⁸ Greenbelt Foundation is a charitable organization dedicated to responsible stewardship of Ontario’s Greenbelt: approximately 81,000 hectares of protected provincial greenspace (<https://www.greenbelt.ca/>).

⁹ Matawa Education Department supports and advises Matawa First Nation community schools and other Education Authorities to provide an educational alternative for Indigenous youth (<http://www.matawa.on.ca/services/education/>).

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region closed. However, FMF could still run sessions in the Indigenous First Nations community schools of Lac LaCroix, Lac Seul, Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek, and Lac des Milles Lacs.

In all the CCS programs offered through R2H, once the meal is ready, everyone sits down to eat together, which is an important time to discuss the events and food of the day and connect on more personal levels. It's during the feasts that participants and facilitators can get to know one another. The adult C4C students and women from CK can socialize and enjoy a peaceful meal without the distractions of their family lives. During this time, the FMF students can connect more deeply to Elders and community members who share stories and teachings during class feasts.

Interviews

After preparing a profile of R2H, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the executive director, three program facilitators, and five program participants. I reached out to the executive director at R2H, Erin Beagle, via email (I have a previous relationship with Erin from my volunteering with the organization). I introduced my research project and informally asked if the R2H CCS community would participate in the study. Erin expressed enthusiasm for the project, wanting to participate. Once I had approval from my thesis committee and Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board to proceed with my proposed research, I sent an information letter to Erin [see Appendix A]. I scheduled an appointment to meet with her to discuss the project and answer any questions she had.

In the meeting with Erin, we determined which cooking-based program staff would be the best to interview for my research. Selection criteria included current staff members who had facilitated food-based programming in the CCS. After the meeting with Erin, I sent a recruitment letter outlining the project to the three suggested staff members, asking if they would

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participate. All three agreed. Once I had confirmation and signed consent forms from the staff members and Erin, I asked them to think of CCS program participants who may be interested in speaking with me about their experiences. I also asked the facilitators to reach out to the CCS participants on my behalf, as the CCS programs had been suspended due to the COVID-19 public health restrictions. Appendix D shows the recruitment text I had prepared for the R2H staff members to use. From that initial round of CCS participant recruitment, eight people expressed interest in being interviewed. I sent study information letters and consent forms to all eight and asked about their interview availability. I received signed consent forms and schedule information from five people; the remaining three did not answer me back. I sent follow-up emails twice more with the remaining three participants but did not hear back from them.

Before each scheduled interview, all study participants were given a copy of:

- the information letter explaining the study and what to expect from their participation in the project [see Appendix B];
- the recruitment letter [see Appendix C];
- the consent form to sign and return to me [see Appendix E];

From January to March 2021, I conducted nine interviews over Zoom, and audio recordings were made from each. (See Appendix F for interview guides) The interview questions centred around the participants' experiences, the organizations' expectations and the current gaps that could be addressed concerning the intersection of cooking, culture, and equity. During the interviews, I made field notes next to the probing questions I had listed on my interview guide as the interviewees spoke, highlighting points they had emphasized. After each session, I spent time writing my thoughts and reflections about what was said, noting similarities and differences between their answers and those of other participants. The interviews lasted

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between 30 to 90 minutes, as some participants were very chatty, adding in many details, and some were very brief with their answers. Though I asked a standard set of questions to CCS program participants and facilitators, I received very different responses from each study participant.

I transcribed the audio recordings and field notes using Otranscribe online, rather than an automated transcription program. I felt that transcribing the audio recordings myself would immerse me in my data, familiarize myself with the contents, and help me critique and advance my interview skills. (My interviews certainly improved throughout data collection!) I transcribed the interviews in total, using intelligent verbatim editing procedures (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006), **bolding** quotes, and words I thought noteworthy. It is important to note that some of the quotes included in this thesis have been edited for clarity and readability. Also, I recognize that my positionality impacted how I transcribed the data; my viewpoint is part of the transcription and overall analysis.

I member checked the edited transcripts by emailing them back to each participant. Many interviewees were satisfied I had captured their thoughts correctly; a few made slight changes or amendments to their answers. Table 1 introduces the study participants.

Table 1. *Data Collection Interview Participants*

Name or Pseudonym*	Role at R2H	Demographic Information
Erin	Executive Director	Female, mid-40s, university-educated
Kim	Facilitator, C4C	Female, mid-40s, university-educated
Airin	Facilitator, CK	Female, mid-40s, university-educated
Riley	R2H Program Staff	Mid-30s, university-educated
Stacey	Participant, C4C	Female, mid-40s, high school-educated
Dani	Participant, C4C	New Canadian, late-20s, high school-educated
Mishael	Translator, CK	New Canadian, female, mid-30s, university-educated
Aya	Translator & participant, CK	New Canadian female, mid-20s, high school educated
Sam	Student, C4C	Male, mid-20s, high school-educated

From this background research and emergent themes from my interviews, I analyzed the data to discuss how the organization attempts to address cultural issues, inequities, and other contributions to participants' determinants of health. I am a fledgling researcher and an old-school student who takes notes with a pen and paper rather than a laptop. To the more experienced researcher, the method of deducing codes I describe below may seem convoluted and messy. But throughout my life, practicing ‘reverse engineering’ has helped me problem solve effectively, using creative and critical thinking to better understand concepts and topics I have grappled with.

I chose not to use software to assist in coding and analyzing my data. Because of the small data set of nine participants, I felt that by analyzing my data without computer software, I

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could utilize my critical thinking skills to focus on depth and conceptual meaning, preserving the context of the interviewees' voices. Knowing that there are different ways in which data are interpreted and represented, I took some time to consider my approach: data analysis is a process that is ongoing and iterative. I wanted to be thorough but also be able to stop at some point. (As a novice researcher, when I started my analysis, I was unsure how to arrive at that point!)

From the edited transcripts, I created a series of Google documents to assist me in the thematic analysis of the interviews. Using a mix of emergent and structured coding, I labelled the Google documents with the broad themes I initially thought would come from the data: Cooking and Practical Skills, Incorporating Culture, and Addressing Equity. As I read through the transcripts and field notes, I added Connection and Belonging as a theme, using the categories to title the Google documents I had created. I began with a first pass of in vivo coding to capture the essence of what the participants had told me. I grouped quotes within each themed document according to commonalities in topics and concepts, using coloured text to differentiate them. As I progressed through the coding process, I developed sub-themes, for example, Decolonization and Diversity/Inclusion, which fell under the Equity category. Again, I read through the interviews to explore patterns, more profound meaning, and individuals' interpretation of group interaction.

I then began to memo about the connections and relationships between them. Though I spent quite a bit of time reviewing and re-evaluating each transcript, the thematic analysis allowed me to find patterns across the data set that helped me understand the study participants' experiences and views of their participation within group CCS classes. I had grounded my research in social constructivism, so thinking of interviewees' answers in the context of group dynamics was essential to my research. From these rounds of coding, I developed my narrative to direct the findings and implications of this research. On the advice of Dr. Levkoe, I created a

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separate document to collect notes about questions and insights that emerged from the interviews or supplemental information to delve deeper into the ideas. As I completed my data analysis, I simultaneously added to this Comments document, which became the basis for my Discussion chapter.

With qualitative research, data saturation is reached when the study can be duplicated with the presented information given by study participants, new information is not provided, and additional coding does not occur (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Though I had a small sample size, I began to reach saturation with the nine interviewees. The small sample size is partly because R2H is a small organization, with few programming staff overseeing the CCS classes. Three of the staff members I spoke with are responsible for implementing the three CCS programs delivered through R2H; the fourth leads the entire organization. These four people all talked about connection and belonging being the driving forces behind the organization's mandate and programming. I spoke with three people from C4C and two who were involved with CK. Though I tried, I was unable to secure interviews with anyone who took part in FMF. I address this point under the Limitations section of this thesis, as I believe COVID-19 inhibited my ability to fully engage in CCS programming as planned and collect more robust data.

In the Findings chapter, I present information synthesized from participant interviews and supplemental material, including direct quotes from participants who exemplify vital ideas and help clarify the main themes. Many study participants agreed to have their quotes and information attributed to them, but some requested anonymity. In the text, I have named interviewees in some cases, and when asked, I have referred to people using pseudonyms. During my data analysis, I discovered the prominence of a central theme that I had not initially anticipated the explicit importance of, at least to the program participants:

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Belonging/Connection. Though the centrality of relationship is a tenet in R2H's mandate, I was happily surprised to the extent that that belief came across to and positively affected the program participants.

Reviewing CCS program documents and interviewing both CCS program facilitators and participants helped me understand how R2H has attempted integrating cooking, culture, and equity elements into its programs. The various data sources also helped me to understand the impacts, successes, and challenges of such programs among the participants.

Ethics Considerations

I received approval from Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board on December 24, 2020. Before starting data collection, I offered study participants informed consent by providing them with an information letter detailing what the research would target, what would be requested of them, and the benefits and risks. While there were very few perceived risks from participating in this research, I recognized that some questions might be perceived as sensitive, and participants might not want certain information made available. Their participation in this study was voluntary, and they were only asked to offer information they felt comfortable sharing with me. Some participants chose not to be identified by name and shared some personal details. Due to the small sample size of study participants, it was difficult to ensure complete anonymity. Still, I have done everything in my power to maintain their anonymity by generalizing their answers and not attributing their name to quotes or information.

All raw data, including audio recordings, notes, transcribed interviews, and signed consent forms, are digital and will be stored on password-protected computers at Lakehead University for up to five years before being destroyed. The final research results will be submitted as part of my thesis requirements and shared with R2H. If participants requested a

copy of the results indicated in their consent form, I would provide them upon completing my research.

Note about the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on my Research

When designing this research project, I had planned to include case studies in other places as part of a multiple case study design. Provincial and state-side border closures and stay-at-home orders forced me to change my research plans. As a result, I chose to focus solely on R2H, which allowed me to rigorously investigate the success of how the organization was able to integrate culture and equity into its programming, in-depth and within a real-life context. Focusing on this site allowed for a specific, unique, and bounded study. I was able to provide a level of detail and understanding that provided evidence of the effectiveness of the programming using a small sample size. R2H programs are unique in northwestern Ontario; rich detail found in this single site case study can provide information about the design and implementation of programs within the context of northwestern Ontario. Other organizations involved in similar work or with similar demographics might glean information helpful to them from this case study.

I increased the number of interviews with both staff and participants and conducted a more focused study of one organization. Also, the public health restrictions meant R2H CCS programming had ceased. During my data collection period, Lakehead University decreed that research must be completed remotely, where possible, so I arranged my interviews to be done using the Zoom video conferencing platform. More details on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions are offered in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology and the data collection and analysis methods used in this research. R2H's profile, mandate, and programs were summarized

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using various information sources made available to me. I then detailed my data collection methods and analysis work using thematic exploration and categorization. In the next chapter, I present the findings from my data collection to explain how R2H is working on using cooking classes as a platform for developing self-efficacy in the participants while incorporating teaching about culture and equity.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this findings chapter, I present data from the research exploring how Roots to Harvest (R2H) attempts to incorporate elements of culture and equity into their Collective Cooking Spaces (CCS) programming. R2H's programming works to consider equity and the impact of social determinants of health (SDOH) on their participants when planning programming or applying for grants. The organization has used a strength-based approach to building skills and self-esteem, working with people to feel empowered in their own lives. Still, it has yet to incorporate teaching or actionable items concerning social issues within the CCS. The theme of belonging and connection proved to be a central theme through which layers of cooking, culture, and equity are woven. In the following section, I demonstrate how this CCS uses cooking as a platform to engage people, incorporate culture, and address equity issues. Also in this section are numerous quotes describing how the R2H cooking programs impact the participants

Benefits of Using Cooking as a Platform in a CCS

Riley said, "there is something special about being in a space where there's laughter, experimentation, and creativity." This beautiful quote aligns nicely with my experience cooking in many places over the years; kitchens naturally lend themselves to allowing people to thrive, developing self-confidence and leadership skills. Kim agrees and thinks that "people don't connect, they don't learn in a classroom at a table with their colleagues the same way they do when their hands are in the flour, and they're flipping pancakes or rolling out pasta. It's just beautiful." This quote demonstrates how CCS are a prime location to highlight the strengths of learning and working together. CCS programs involve collaborative learning within a social and cultural context. By working together to create food with a group, participants construct meaning and understanding together, utilizing new concepts, and sharing knowledge with their peers.

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All three cooking programs at R2H showcase this well, despite their different program goals. Participating in these programs illustrates how the social constructivism epistemology meld with learning in a kitchen setting. The following three subsections describe how the R2H CCS programs I researched, Cooking for Cred, FMF, and CK, impact the people involved. To note: unfortunately, the public health restrictions and closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic ceased CCS programming, cutting short my in-class involvement with the participants, as planned. Some of the following experiences are based on our collective CCS class experiences before March 2020, rather than simply including information received in the interviews.

Cooking For Cred. Erin understands that “sometimes it's difficult to go to school. There are ways of learning that are more interesting and immersive than sitting in a classroom.” Her explanation of this program is that “adult learners are treated like adults, not children.” C4C introduces the students to community mentors and teaches them transferable skills to help open their career paths going forward. Kim shared that the “C4C program's goals are learning about food systems, basic food literacy, hands-on food preparation, employment skills and certification.” She “builds the program around these objectives, offers safe food handling certification, and invites local chefs to help teach the students.” I was lucky enough to be invited to lead C4C sessions! While instructing these classes, some of the topics I have covered included cooking well on a budget, utilizing local foods, and baking. Other chefs have taught knife skills, butchery, and canning. Kim said that “experimentation, learning together, and using local food are other essential program goals.” Early in the C4C programs, Kim holds “brainstorming sessions [around a] whiteboard” and tries to “build programming around topics and foods the students bring up.” For example, the students wanted to make salads, so Kim

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“included a session on sprouting beforehand so [the participants] could add sprouts to their salad.”

Forest Meets Farm. Riley stated that “R2H has been very mindful of being respectful and intentional in its approach, especially when working with Indigenous people.” Riley spoke about how “the land-based teaching framework of FMF has opened the door to building good relationships and exploring different foods and food systems with [members of] local First Nations communities and area schools.” Riley said the importance of relationship-building is evident in the fact that “R2H consults members of the different communities they work with, asking for input and feedback on topics to cover,” and offering “Elders and knowledge keepers the opportunity to lead sessions with the students.” They told me that “the beautiful thing about this program is that there is space for conversations and experiences to happen between facilitators, knowledge keepers, and students of all ages to reconnect in a meaningful way.”

Riley also recounted a field trip to R2H's Lillie St. Farm that saw the “FMF [high school] students digging potatoes to make poutine later in the day, engaging them to work together and tying their food back to the land.” They told me that a former FMF facilitator “took the students fishing one afternoon and then led a workshop on how to smoke fish using the whitefish the students had caught.” Riley also spoke about how “an Elder donated moose meat to an FMF class and shared teachings around the significance of moose [to Anishinaabe people].” The class then made sausages with moose meat and shared them with their community.

Post-program classroom teacher evaluations expressed their appreciation and support of the program, indicating that the program offered a “very accessible learning environment” and “it was a great opportunity to have Elders teaching” the students. For students, exit evaluations show an increase in learning about foraged and farmed foods and their skills in recognizing and

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preparing these foods. This type of hands-in-the-dirt learning has youth asking questions about their culture, food, and part in the food system.

Culture Kitchen. At first, “feeling isolated at home with young families,” then being “forced to flee due to war,” and finally, “finding themselves in a new country with unfamiliar language and customs, the CK women had to get used to being polite to each other,” remembers facilitator Airin Stephens. She joked that the initial cohort of “CK women had very distinct personalities.” The women “represented Shia and Sunni Muslim sects from Syria, Jordan, Kurdistan, and Morocco, with different experiences and backgrounds that introduced many layers of complexities to the group.” An experienced educator, Airin, “made it a point to arrange the women into different working groups during each class to help bridge their differences, encouraging the women to learn and create together.” Airin recalled that at the onset of the program, “the women were quite stubborn and disinterested in making or tasting new foods,” explaining that “it’s difficult to relinquish control over something they feel confident in [which is cooking] - something that’s so ingrained in their identity - when they have limited control over other aspects of their lives.” Before long, “the women became friendly toward each other, sharing stories and jokes” easily. Aya remembers that “because the women spoke Arabic and their traditions were quite similar, they didn’t feel like the other differences mattered.” She and her mother, Duha, “had fun practicing English and learning about life in Canada” and said that CK was “about bringing people together and enjoying trying new foods.” I witnessed volunteers assisting the women in writing down their recipes, which Airin said “was new to them, as was describing what they’d made in English once the food was ready to eat.” Airin worked hard to establish a community of equals, “encouraging women to try other dishes without comparison or derogatory comments.”

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The women had expressed interest in learning more about different foods, or “what Canadian families eat every day or on special holidays,” explained Aya. I volunteered to lead the CK class on Salad Day. I suggested to Airin that we make Caesar salad and a spinach-strawberry-goat cheese salad, both of which have been longstanding popular menu items in many Canadian restaurants. I changed my Caesar dressing recipe slightly, omitting anchovy-containing Worcestershire sauce and bacon from the salad to adhere to Muslim dietary laws. At first, the women were skeptical of the Caesar salad but loved it after trying it. One of the women told me the taste of the lemon juice, garlic and Parmesan were “really amazing together, and I can’t stop eating the croutons.” The spinach salad did not go over very well with the CK crowd, despite containing feta cheese and spinach used extensively in Middle Eastern cooking. The women told me (through Aya) that they “did not like to eat raw spinach and couldn’t understand the sweet-salty combination of the strawberries and the feta cheese.” Despite the lukewarm reviews, one woman told me she “liked the salad’s poppy seed dressing and that she’d try it at home.”

Connection and Belonging

Early in my data collection, it became clear that the theme of connection and belonging was at the heart of all the R2H programs. Erin emphasized that a large part of R2H’s aim is the “confidence, sense of accomplishment and validation that comes from participants learning and challenging themselves,” especially when given the right tools. Referencing the organization’s exit surveys, Erin reports that “approximately 35% of participants have indicated a feeling of increased household food security because of the food they bring home after CCS classes.”

The CCS provides the opportunity for connection and learning cooking skills. During our interview, Erin told me, “[c]ommunity kitchen cooking programs are human-centred, not

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food-centred, and that's important if we want to see beyond just [increased] food skills." In this vein, R2H builds self-esteem and self-worth in the people they work with, which happens through food. Erin then elaborated on that idea to say the primary goal of R2H's work is "always to create meaningful ways to be with people in a way that is interactive and based on food." Kim said:

I joined [R2H in] the not-for-profit world because of the people. I wanted to work with people every day, all day, and in a way that felt like it had meaning, purpose, and true connection, not just superficial connection. I feel like the work that we do at R2H allows us to develop relationships.

The staff at R2H that I interviewed felt that "the cornerstone of building good relationships is working with the same group of people repeatedly, over time." Riley reiterated that "developing trust and having continued conversations with [these CCS participants] is essential for R2H's outcomes." Riley added that they "love how food is the pathway for connecting with people. Even if you don't speak the same language, you can get to know someone and can connect through the food you're making."

In their exit surveys I examined, C4C, CK, and FMF program participants identified that they felt very comfortable and at ease during their time with R2H. One participant noted, "everyone was so kind and accepting," and "the staff is very friendly and wants what's best for us." One C4C participant wrote: "Time here made me learn and feel happier than I would have thought."

During their interviews, Stacey and Dani both told me they thought they felt "part of a big family" at R2H, which was powerful for them; both interviewees talked about having complicated childhoods, where they experienced trauma and loneliness. Stacey also said, "R2H

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feels so homey - you walk in, and the whole building just envelopes you in a hug and love." Erin knows "that the idea of family can be challenging for some." Kim explained that R2H has intentionally set out to create their version of an unconditionally caring family environment that "meets people where they are, offers fresh starts every day, gentle nudges when needed," and steps in if necessary. Kim told me R2H works "from a compassionate, but strength-based approach." She said:

If someone arrives and they're really anxious or intoxicated, we try to meet them where they are. Sometimes that means moving them to a different space to be well. Sometimes that means sending them home so they can come back tomorrow to start over with a clean slate.

Kim emphasized that "this one thing you did one day doesn't define who you are forever, or who you can be in the future." Erin outlined that R2H "is not a summer camp. It's not a social services program." She is quick to say that the organization is always "careful not to assume that just because people have taken part in their CCS or have lived in poverty, they lack food skills or eat unhealthily."

Because of R2H's approach of "being human-centred and wanting to foster outcomes beyond food skills," Erin told me that organization has intentionally filled its staff and volunteer roster with people who come with experience in social services, education, nutrition, and counselling to offer compassion and support to everyone who walks through their doors. For example, Kim has worked to "build a sense of family" within the classes she leads. She said, "everyone is welcome to make themselves at home and enjoy themselves, but they're also responsible for doing dishes and cleaning up afterward because that's what families do." Riley

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said they know a class is going well "when there is laughter and a certain kind of easy pace, where it feels like you're cooking at home. People have time to speak, laugh, and share stories."

R2H attempts to develop an atmosphere of cooperation and teamwork in the CCS classes as people learn about the food they're preparing. Kim sees the people she works with "coming alive in this space. And when you ask me why I do this work, it's because of that." Classroom teachers have expressed surprise and delight about previously "shy students asking questions and participating during FMF workshops." R2H staff have a good rapport with the schools with which they work. For instance, Riley said that "if a youth is seen to require extra support, teachers and R2H staff feel comfortable speaking candidly about ways to help them." Riley talked about "students they've had in their workshops that the classroom teachers felt might benefit from extra experience and support offered through R2H farming programs." Being someone who led fun food workshops, Riley had built a rapport with the students and "felt comfortable speaking with them about joining the summer urban farm programs." The students "joined the youth farm crews and were able to access the wrap-around support system offered by R2H," including friendship and belonging and access to services and agencies like counsellors, housing, or income support.

Stacey told me that "there are sometimes disagreements between participants, much like siblings in any family." Kim also spoke about this and told me there had been participants "that have tried to stir up trouble within the group." She sees these situations as "opportunities for teaching compassion through having conversations with people." As an example, Stacey told me about "a situation where her pride got in the way of dealing with another student." Kim took Stacey aside to say, "you don't know where this person is coming from or what their struggles are. You may even have the same struggles as they do." That conversation helped Stacey

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“change her perspective to view others with more compassion and an open mind.” Dani is originally from Jamaica and talked about “really missing her friends and family living there still.” Dani is also “very happy to be a part of the R2H family,” who have listened to her and offered advice when needed. Dani also said, “R2H makes me feel appreciated, and like I belong somewhere, finally.” The importance of connection was the primary feeling and theme of the interviews I conducted. Program staff and participants all spoke about how close they felt to each other during their time with R2H. All the people I spoke with have remained connected, even during the COVID-19 closures. Sam said he “chats with [others from C4C] on a weekly basis on social media platforms,” as does Stacey, who offered, “it was really important to try to stay connected during this crazy time. I had a really hard time not seeing everyone.”

R2H programs regularly bring in local chefs, food preservers, and other producers to lead sessions in the kitchen. Erin said that with the organization being “human-centred, there have to be great humans that run [the programs]. The investment in humans that are involved in the facilitation and implementation of them has to be paramount.” Recognizing “different staff personalities don't always click with every participant,” Erin says the organization “chooses guest chefs and other community experts not only because of the skills they have” but because of their “presence that resonates with people that we're not resonating with all the time.” I have had the opportunity to work with C4C and CK classes and have found this all true. An example of a community expert going above and beyond what was usual or expected happened during the first iteration of CK, when facilitator Airin organized the women to become certified in food safety. From my time working in public health and food safety, I know that under ordinary circumstances in Thunder Bay, a trained public health inspector (PHI) would teach a 6–7-hour food safety class in English. The attendees then write a test (also in English) to become

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certified. But, in this case, Airin said, “the course ran quite differently. Many of the women involved in CK spoke very little English.” Airin told me that “during the food safety class, as the PHI spoke and showed slides, [Airin] had organized an Arabic-speaking translator to support two women in the course. “ Airin also “arranged prayer spaces for the women at the Health Unit and scheduled time for prayer practice and mealtimes during the day.” To accommodate the course that usually took six hours, Airin said, “it took almost twelve hours to get through everything.” For the testing portion of the certification, Airin recalled, “some women tested in English, some wrote an Arabic test, and some tested orally in Arabic. It was quite the undertaking, and the first time the Thunder Bay District Health Unit had made these kinds of accommodations.” Airin worked hard to make the women feel comfortable and help to meet their needs; she told me the PHI “felt that her involvement with CK was one of the most important and rewarding things she'd done in her career and facilitated growth for her and her department in different ways.” Further to this point, Airin said of the PHI, that “even for kitchens outside of her catchment area, the health inspector agreed to perform their inspections because of her relationship with the women and understanding of their culture.”

Some of the success stories from the CK program include several women who have opened food-based businesses operating from their homes and restaurants. For example, Aya and her mother, Duha Shaar, founded their company, Royal Aleppo Food, after taking part in CK in 2019. Aya told me that “through CK, [the women] obtained safe food handling certification, learned about customer service and business management.” In late 2019, the two felt inspired to “open a home-based catering business specializing in Syrian food.” Aya recounted that “in June 2020, [the] family opened a store-front [operation in the waterfront business district] in Thunder

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Bay” and has “been very successful” despite the pandemic restrictions over the past eighteen months.

Kim said that “the work R2H does is more like social work than simply kitchen work; regular check-ins, hugs, and chats are readily available to everyone.” She believes that this openness is “less intimidating to participants and helps people help themselves by solving problems together.” She and Erin both said that “mental health, and especially anxiety and social isolation, are areas where some participants struggle.” Kim told me there were times when participants “found it challenging to get on the bus and walk through the door at R2H because of crippling social anxiety.” Riley and Kim talked about how program participants “turn to different things” (beneficial or otherwise) to cope with these mental health challenges. Riley talked about how staff and volunteers of “R2H are offered training opportunities to support people going through challenging times. For instance, some staff have taken mental health first aid classes and SafeTALK, [a suicide prevention course.]” Kim expressed that “wanting to help people in difficult places is important” to staff who work for the organization, as was demonstrated when she told me about “accompanying [a participant] to the hospital to sit with them during a psychotic episode.” Riley revealed that “despite the best efforts of people around them, sometimes [program participants] fall back into old patterns or environments, sometimes with devastating results.” Over the years, I have read some beautiful tributes on social media written by R2H staff of program participants who passed away. The caring atmosphere within the R2H circle is palpable.

Kim loves to see participants “reaching out to others in the group who may struggle,” building their understanding and empathy while initiating conversations and making connections. She told me that “being a part of a community, [like in the CCS,] people reach out

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and look after one another, becoming concerned if a fellow participant is inexplicably late, absent or needs assistance” while at the CCS. Sam and Stacey both talked about how they still have close contact with R2H staff and constantly check in with other participants and staff, via social media or in person. Stacey works at a local grocery store and told me “that [R2H community navigator] Katie is going to start shopping on Saturdays just so she can come and say hi!” Stacey then said to me that a “few of the other [C4C students] had also come in the store to see her, and [she] started crying because I miss my people so much.” Aya is “so happy to see people she knows through R2H out in the city, or when they order food from [her] restaurant. It’s like no time has passed.” Many of the participants and staff are connected on various social media platforms, like Facebook or Instagram. Alex, Stacey, and Dani told me how they often message back and forth. Stacey said it’s “to make sure everyone is surviving during these never-ending [pandemic] lockdowns.” She went on to admit that “these connections have been beneficial” in smoothing out the rough edges of the pandemic restrictions. Stacey told me about a former C4C participant she saw in the grocery store that “survived the pandemic cooking with [their] kids, the dishes I learned at R2H. They’re learning, and we’re all keeping busy during the lockdowns. It was a win-win situation!”

Airin told me that “CK was designed as a training program focused on reducing social isolation in newcomer women.” She explained that “many of the women who participated had married and started families as teenagers and had fled war-torn countries and lived in refugee camps before coming to Canada.” Despite these commonalities, each woman is a different age, at a different stage of being in Canada, and varies in personality, background, and experiences. This program has created a way for them to feel more connected to Thunder Bay while reducing isolation. Airin is happy to report that “building connections between the women and R2H,

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while not a primary goal,” resulted from CK participation. Airin says she enthusiastically “acts as a liaison for the women” she's worked with at CK - often, she said, “if they need something, they will call me, and I will find someone to connect them to.” According to Mishael, “the CK women now see R2H as an integral part of navigating life in Canada.” Aya thought:

R2H did a great job in bringing people together. The atmosphere in the CK was very harmonious and similar to what we had back home when our family was cooking together and sharing food with love. R2H made it easy to do that through food.

Riley told me that:

Being rooted in the community makes R2H special to many people who are struggling. R2H sees people trying their best, despite systems that have failed them. [The organization] makes sure these voices are heard and that there is enough room for everyone at the table.

Erin also said:

We want people to feel welcome and safe to express themselves and show up as they are. We want them to like us, so they come back and know they can trust us to tell us what's going on so that we can help figure it out together.

Riley told me about the organization's community navigator, Katie, who offers “immersive, wrap-around supports and who helps connect people to agencies and services they may need.” They further explained, saying that “taking part in an R2H program allows people to safely flourish and grow while lessening the burden of the many social challenges they may be facing, like poverty, racism, food insecurity, and barriers to housing or education.” When R2H programs end, program participants re-enter the worlds from where they come. As mentioned above, Riley remarked that “sometimes, those worlds involve patterns or behaviours or [people]

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face systemic barriers that seem impossible, and they end up in very dark spaces.” But, often, people have used skills and confidence gained through CCS programming to their advantage, taking agency over their lives and becoming successful in things they've attempted. Kim excitedly told me that several past participants have “asked R2H staff to act as references at jobs to which they have applied.” And connections made with area chefs or organizations have led to CCS program participants working in the food industry after their time at R2H. For instance, after “feeling uninspired working as a line cook,” Sam “was looking to make a difference.” They “started working part-time at [an emergency food provision kitchen] because of a connection made through R2H.” After learning about social challenges faced by many in our City, Kim expressed that Sam “feels proud to provide food and cook meals for people in this capacity.”

According to Kim:

One of the benefits of cooking together over the space of 2-3 hours [in a CCS], several times a week for many weeks, is that people will start to talk: they'll tell you what they've always wanted to learn how to cook, or that their grandma always made the best *{this}*.

The program staff I spoke with alluded to the fact that they've seen how people in their programs forge social connections and friendships over food, helping many feel valued. One told me, “This feeling of belonging has helped many [R2H CCS participants] overcome anxiety and isolation, making them feel like they matter.”

At one point in our conversation, Kim commented that “there had been many discussions lately at R2H about what is considered essential work.” She explained that “if [being a part of R2H] creates such a connection for those humans, is that essential for their mental and physical health? We think so.” R2H prioritizes social connection, which the organization feels helps people feel more fulfilled and realize their full potential.

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In brief, R2H is an ally and works to create safe spaces where staff check-in with participants; everyone is encouraged to be themselves by celebrating self-identity. R2H is conscious of asking for input from partners and participants and encourages giving people a voice when they feel otherwise ignored. For example, Lakehead Public Schools designated the R2H CCS programs as an essential service. In September 2021, R2H worked closely with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit to deliver COVID-19 safe, outdoor programming to area students (Farm to Cafeteria Canada, 2021).

Incorporating Culture into CCS Programming

Airin outlined that “the key to successful cultural programming [within an organization] is having the right people in place to navigate those cultural lines.” Riley recognized how “building trust and acknowledging power and privilege is essential to establishing and maintaining good relationships.” As touched on before, R2H hires staff and recruits volunteers based on their humanness and outlook - their compassionate qualities and ability to connect with people, instead of only the training and certifications they hold. Riley commented that they “feel very supported in personal and professional development relevant to their jobs; R2H is very generous in time and money, allowing them the opportunity to take part in webinars and training sessions, such as SafeTALK, mental health first aid, and engaging youth.” In addition, Riley spoke to “R2H’s openness to learning and having many conversations about topics like Indigenous food sovereignty, reconciliation, and respectful, reciprocal relationships.” In one interview, I was told, “there is always space for sharing resources and learning in general at R2H.” This staff member thought that leaning into uncomfortable discussions and situations helps the staff thrive and grow.

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In the Methods chapter, I touched on the history of racial tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Thunder Bay. Aiming to 'walk the talk,' Erin, Airin, Riley and Kim all said R2H staff have spent time “reading and discussing the Truth and Reconciliation report and trying to implement some of the calls to action” in their day-to-day operations and mandate. Airin spoke about how “R2H’s 2019 Strategic Plan aims to shift their language and practices to be more inclusive of people, space, and systemic barriers and acknowledge their part in reconciliation.” To this point, each year, R2H recognizes National Indigenous Day (June 21st) as a statutory organizational holiday, and this year, on July 1st, it posted to social media:

At Roots, we're thinking about the country we want to live in. One that gives access to the truth so that we can learn, unlearn, confront, and reconcile. It's not history yet. It's now. And after Canada Day, let's dig into it. It's the only way we're going to get at this - face it with humility, gentleness, vulnerability (R2H, 2021c).

An example of R2H’s commitment to reconciliation occurred during the trial of Brayden Bushby in November 2020. In July 2017, Barbara Kentner, an Indigenous woman in Thunder Bay, died after being struck by a trailer hitch thrown by Bushby in a passing car (MacDonald, 2017). The morning the trial started, a sacred fire was lit in the parking lot of a local business. The community members were welcomed to attend the healing fire to stand in solidarity and support the Kentner family. Sam told me that “R2H closed its doors and invited everyone to join them at the fire.” In speaking with Sam, he told me about attending the fire with his fellow R2H friends. Sam acknowledged how “powerfully this action of standing with others at the sacred fire impacted [him].” He went on to say how much taking part in the sacred fire circle influenced his “life perspective, and [his] ability to make a difference with one simple action.”

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Riley talked about R2H being mindful and universally inclusive in its approach. They said, “the staff are aware of the significance of incorporating Indigenous worldviews and land-based learning in their FMF program but are careful not to overstep cultural bounds.” While being wary of not running a “tokenized” Indigenous cooking program, Riley shared that many Ojibwe “knowledge keepers and Elders have been consulted and brought in to lead sessions for students where appropriate.” For instance, youth educator Marcel Bannanish Sr. lives on the Fort William First Nation and is active in planning and leading sessions in FMF. In the program’s book, Marcel says, “In teaching us to harvest food, Elders can truly see us and find the right tools to help us become stronger, individually, and as a community” (Roots to Harvest, 2018, p. 71).

In planning FMF, Riley mentioned that R2H has made it a priority to “involve partners such as Matawa First Nations Management, Lakehead Public Schools, and area First Nation communities: Fort William, Lac La Croix, Lac Seul, Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek” to make this a unique experience for everyone involved. In FMF program evaluations, classroom teachers reported a “high level of interest and engagement from Indigenous and non-Indigenous students,” marveling at how “each class was incredibly special: Elders teaching students how to prepare geese and cook other traditional food,” and “the workshop that showed youth how to [eviscerate] a Canada goose and singe [its pin] feathers was a highlight!” Speaking of a successful FMF fishing expedition, one classroom teacher communicated that FMF “makes it real! The speakers are giving context to the lives of these food producers.” Riley told me they were:

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[V]ery mindful of being a white settler and the privilege that brings, coming into community schools to teach students about food, realizing there's an aspect of knowledge of the land [they] don't want to presume - it's not [their] place to do so.

Riley also related to me how an Indigenous knowledge keeper “talked about the importance of fish to Ojibwe people” and how the community member “held attention and shared his wisdom around the connection to food. It's just something that I don't think I'll ever be able to do.”

Kim shared that students from the C4C program are encouraged to showcase their cultures by bringing in their family recipes to cook with their classmates. She said that “not only do participants get to try new foods,” but the person responsible for teaching their classmates about Jamaican Rundown or Ukrainian Varenyky “also gets practice in organizing and leading a session - all things that add up to feelings of validation and accomplishment.” Kim indicated that “a woman had led the C4C class in making her Granny’s bannock,” and Dani conveyed that they “had showed the class how to make curried goat.” Both students felt honoured to share their heritage and proud to have shared their skills with their classmates. Kim said that “after a year and a half, staff and students are still talking about [a Senegalese participant's] incredible Onion Sauce!” I was volunteering the day that person made the sauce and was fortunate to try it firsthand. I can still remember the complex flavour. And, another afternoon, I happened to show up at R2H's kitchen just in time for a bowl of the most beautifully fragrant bowl of Thai coconut curry and basmati rice, made by a Karen woman. Talk about being somewhere at the right time! Stacey exclaimed that C4C participants “loved learning about food from other cultures and were excited to try new foods they had never eaten before, like goat.” She “even ate and enjoyed foods I’ve never liked, like Hollandaise sauce.” Kim says one of her favourite parts of C4C is

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that "people are quick to start chatting about a particular item their grandma made, or how they've tried a dish that tasted similar to this, but it was made in this different way." In this CCS, she said, "people learn from each other and share beautiful foods they've brought with them from their cultures.

Airin "knew for the CK program to be successful, she needed the Muslim women to buy into her and her comfortability in navigating those cultural lines." Mishael, one of the program's Arabic-speaking translators, said of Airin, "She's amazing. She's consistent and committed, and her treatment of the women and the CK program is really inspiring." Airin remembered that "the program started with finding translators who could speak to the incoming women who were at different ages and stages of being in Canada."

At the time of her involvement as a translator with CK, Aya was a 22-year-old Syrian refugee. I have thought Aya to be somewhat shy but very gracious and friendly in my dealings with her. Airin told me that tensions rose as Aya was placed "in an awkward situation due to her age and position within the group having to translate [Airin's] instructions to the women" about their attendance or cell phone use during class. She then explained that the tension dissipated quickly as the women became accustomed to Aya translating for them. Airin expressed that now, many CK women look to Aya and her family as hopeful examples of what could happen for them, as the family currently operates a successful restaurant in town.

A local settlement organization employed Mishael before working with the CK. As a young, single woman, she moved to Canada from Saudi Arabia in her 20s to pursue a second university degree and opportunities in different surroundings. Airin said that Mishael discussed education options and being an independent woman in Canada with the newcomer women. Mishael told me about a time she "received a call while studying in the Lakehead

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University library. Some of the women had just finished their CK class and had a box of food for [her]!” She also remembered that “in typical Middle Eastern mom-style,” the women embraced Mishael, “inviting me into their homes and giving me food when I left so I wouldn't go hungry because I am a woman and am apart from my family.”

Another woman I didn't interview but was told about by Airin as someone she wanted the CK women to meet was an Iraqi who came to Canada with her husband as an economic immigrant. Airin thought, “it would be interesting for the CK women to get to know the Arab Muslim wife and mother, as she was highly educated, had been in Canada for quite some time, and chose not to wear the hijab.” Airin told me the CK women looked up to the Iraqi woman “as someone who had successfully adapted to life here and could help them make connections and navigate the transition (not assimilation) to their new lives in Canada.”

Airin recounted that “having these women in the space at R2H required staff to be aware of different protocols around touching or hugging them, their bathroom use of water instead of toilet paper, making prayer space available, and having men in the room.” Aya told me that “the best part of CK for her was the hugs. I love that you guys greet with hugs - it's so warm and so nice!” As the class progressed, Airin would “encourage male staff members to make conversation with the women, asking about what they were cooking to help them know that it was ok to speak with a man who wasn't their husband.” One of the regular chefs Airin brought in for CK had, through her church group, sponsored a family of Syrian refugees a few years before taking part in CK. Airin explained that this female chef “was instrumental in helping the women see that a woman could still be devoted to her family and her faith and own and operate a successful business independent of her husband.” Mishael further explained:

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Meeting [this chef] who was married, and had kids, and had her own business was a foreign concept for the [CK] women, but they liked it. It really got them thinking, ‘maybe I can do this, too.’ This change in the women’s attitudes caused some disturbances in their homes. The husbands may not have liked their wives learning new things, making friends outside of the family, and becoming more independent, but it was healthy and natural. The household would benefit from these changes.

Mishael admitted that change was a scary proposition for some:

It's challenging being raised in a tight box, where the only options for women are children, chores, and their husbands. But, at the same time, it's exciting for the women to think about their potential and all the choices and possibilities available to them with education, their career, and friendships.

Upon arrival in the program, Airin said, “some women hated to cook, as it had been forced on them early.” Over the weeks together, the women appreciated how food could connect them and their cultures and empower them. Aya told me:

The most important thing about the CK is that it truly helped the women feel independent and stronger and helped them feel that life wasn’t just staying home and cooking: you can improve yourself, show your community, your food, and a part of your culture through food.

Airin remembered that:

Having [the public health inspector] teaching food safety to Muslim women meant a huge learning curve for both the inspector and the women. For instance, Muslim women do not show their forearms, which is tricky if they receive a short-sleeved uniform for their job or are asked to wash a sink full of dishes.

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In broaching the subject of cultural contexts of different foods, Airin “asked [the PHI] to change some examples for the women, because many of the food safety examples used pork, which the women don't eat, but may be asked to prepare as part of their jobs.” Airin also asked the PHI to “include temperature examples from foods the Muslim women would prepare at home,” such as dairy, legumes, or Halal meats. In the end, the women earned their safe food handling certification through the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, practiced their English, and felt much more confident in applying for jobs in Thunder Bay kitchens.

Unpacking Equity in CCS Programming

“R2H staff are comfortable being uncomfortable:” Riley expressed gratitude for “the opportunities to unlearn, learn, and grow alongside R2H’s people.” They told me that “since the beginning, [the organization’s leadership team] has spent time reflecting and leaning into issues and questions challenging poverty and racism in Thunder Bay.” R2H’s tireless work elevating the conversation around dignified food access in our region during the pandemic speaks volumes to that. As mentioned in previous sections, R2H is built on creating equity and belonging in safe spaces, giving people the freedom to be who they are, without judgement, discrimination, or pre-conceived notions. R2H is a place where people can make mistakes and be afforded a fresh start every time.

Erin told me that “poverty is the underlying social issue that connects most of their participants.” Riley further explained that “some also struggle with mental wellness, addictions, and being the target of racism and marginalization.” The new, bright, fully equipped industrial kitchen at R2H acts as an equalizer and a unifier. In this space, everyone has access to the same tools, food, and learning and can come together to share their knowledge and experience. I have seen this while working with CCS students in the space. No matter their background, and even if

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there are language barriers, we can all talk, laugh, and share our stories and knowledge around food.

Kim commented:

When we apply for funding to run these programs, we try to address some of the socio-economic barriers. With the recent funding, we had offered childcare and transportation (bus tickets). There is a little stipend so that people get some funding at the end of [the program], and there's money offered to run safe food handling so that people can put that on their resumes for future employment opportunities. And, we provide food.

Despite these attempts to incorporate equity into their programming, staff also indicated that to date, R2H has not intentionally included formal social justice instruction into their CCS programming. Says Erin:

We don't talk about [social justice] in our programs. All we're trying to do is get them to like us so that they come back and know they can trust us to tell us what's going on so that we can help figure it out.

Erin also explained that with all the programming R2H does, whether cooking, farming, or working in remote schools, “poverty is the most significant issue that connects the [participants].”

Riley answered this interview question differently, stating:

We do see a lot of social issues arise in our programming because we check in with people. Sometimes, the answer is 'I'm not ok,' and sometimes that's based on racism, or poverty, or other barriers that are influencing a person's ability to function in the world.

Kim said R2H:

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Tr[ies] to put into consideration racialization and marginalization, mental health, and addictions pieces because we know that the majority of the people that walk through our door have one or all of those things that are impacting their day-to-day life.

She then further explained:

[The organization is] working from a compassionate but also strength-based approach, and we try to adapt. If someone comes in and they are super anxious, or intoxicated, or whatever that is for them, we try to meet them where they're at. Whether that means moving them to a different space to be well and healthy, or whether that means sending them home and coming back tomorrow with a clean slate and starting over. Those are ways that we approach the programs that we're offering.

Though they don't include specific classes on equity, they do have difficult conversations. Airin said that likely, “many of the women in the CK have not encountered someone from the LGBTQ+ community and, as such, are still learning about them.” When the women would make comments about people who identified as part of the queer community, including transgender staff at R2H, Airin would use the opportunity to ask, “courageous questions and have courageous conversations with the women.” She told them frankly that:

If you want Canada to accept you, if you want to be able to wear your hijab and practice your faith under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, you need to know that other people can exist, too. You cannot pick and choose.

To speak to differences between cultural practices, Airin asked the CK women, “what are things that happen in your cultural community that don't happen here?” She explained that “the women said they breastfeed many kids, [who are] considered your siblings even though they

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have no blood relation.” These conversations also led to other candid discussions where Airin shared widely accepted equitable views:

It is okay for women to have a job outside of your husband, and you need to start treating your girls better than your boys. I have a hard, hard, hard time with [that], and I've seen it too many times. I want to talk about birth control [and say] it is possible not to have babies and not tell your husband that it's a woman's choice to do that.

We spoke about how arranged marriages are still quite common in Arabic Muslim communities in Canada. Airin told me about an Arabic Muslim family she knows who is “actually quite progressive. [The mother] is open to a love marriage [for her daughter] and wants her to do school before she gets married. [The daughter] doesn't want to get married.”

In this class, the women were exposed to so many new ideas. When I asked about acting on social justice issues within CK, Airin said they haven't yet, that the women are “just figuring out life. They have not even fully settled, and they have lived a life of war, and I think they are just barely surviving. They are just trying to live.” We spoke about how their past experiences affect the CK women, and Airin remarked:

A lot of them have this survivor complex, where they are living, and their family is struggling, or they're still living in fear, are still living in war. [They think,] why should they be alive if their family and friends aren't, and the constant fear of what's happening to them over there.

She went on to explain that introducing social justice work into the CK is:

Not a goal, and I don't think it'll ever be a goal of this program, because I just think [the women] are needing to settle and to find a sense of normalcy in their life in a whole new

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foreign land, with a new language, with a new dominant religion, with all sorts of new things.

CK focuses on helping the women get to know one another and transition to a peaceful, equitable life in Canada instead.

In March 2020, after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, Thunder Bay went into lockdown like much of the world. With my work supporting the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (TBAFS), I attended regular, virtual Emergency Food Response meetings with regional organizations. R2H was an active voice at those meetings, busy providing food and advocating for improving dignified food access for people.

From my position with TBAFS, I observed R2H immediately springing into action upon closures of area schools. The organization prepared food hampers for area students to help bridge the gap of school student nutrition programs they would have otherwise accessed at school. In addition, R2H partnered with many local organizations to provide funds for food and delivery support on those organizations' distribution days. R2H began to prepare meals for Elders through the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre and women who were involved with the Elizabeth Fry Society, as well as supporting food initiatives with other community agencies.

Airin spoke about R2H addressing the need for enhancing dignified food access in Thunder Bay, especially when the pandemic began:

We noticed a lot of newcomers were going to the food bank, and the food they were getting was not culturally appropriate. It was pork & beans, canned soup, pasta, lasagna noodles. We'[d] been partnering with all of these different organizations and want[ed] to come up with a culturally appropriate food box that newcomers [could] get once a week.

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Airin further explained that some organizations in Thunder Bay “ask people for their T-4s [for proof income], and it’s not dignified. [The organization] said, ‘they’re on O[ntario] W[orks], and that’s enough.’” Airin argued that governmental financial assistance that newcomer families receive “is not enough for tahina, or the foods that they need that are harder to get.”

Because there was a need for more dignified food access than currently available, R2H worked to fill the gap. They began assembling and distributing emergency food hampers appropriate for families following Islamic dietary laws. Out went pork and beans, canned soup, and canned fish. Instead, families received canned legumes and beans, tahini, and Halal bouillon cubes; the emergency food parcels R2H sent out during the pandemic included fresh fruit and vegetables. Of the emergency food provision R2H facilitated, Airin said:

We've just taken it on ourselves. In a way, we've done what we didn't want to become, which was having people pick up stuff at [R2H]. But we're doing it because we're noticing there's a need. Every time we're volunteering at the food bank, we see at least ten families that come that are Arabic speakers. So, we have put together these once-a-month food bags with tahina, red pepper paste, halal bouillon cubes, lentils or chickpeas, potatoes, and carrots - the stuff that everyone should be getting: the fresh fruits and vegetables.

Concerning equity at FMF workshops, Riley told me that every session could be unique, as the staff are careful to: "Recognize different spaces with different people with different stories and lives." They described:

Most students in a grade 12 university level at Superior have many things in place for them to succeed academically. Generally, they've had support from their families during

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their school careers, and there is a plan and funding in place for them to attend university or college.

When R2H does workshops at the Matawa Education and Care Centre or Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School, Riley is aware:

That things are going to be different for the [Indigenous] students. They have to come all the way to thunder bay from their home community to get a high school education.

They're disconnected from their families. During this time, they're living in a completely different place. A lot of them are living with, in the beginning, strangers, and it's in a completely different context. And, they're still teenagers - they still just want to be kids.

Reflecting on the disparity between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students they work with, Riley wonders, “[w]hat's happening in the community? What's happening behind the scenes that might influence a student's mental health, their ability to show up for class, or for programming? How they might just be in the space when they're there?” They feel that to better support the students, "there has to be more understanding; the expectations have to flex in different places." They also talked about working in Indigenous communities and the inequities encountered there that others may take for granted, such as clean drinking water:

I might come in and make pasta from scratch with a class, but I have to think about bringing in clean water. Because the community, even though they're [not far from] the main highway, are still under a boil water advisory. These kinds of systemic issues come up in a day-to-day way. For me, it's just a matter of bringing a big [container] of fresh water; for the community, it's a matter of living it every day.

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Riley wrestles with their power and privilege in delivering workshops in communities such as these:

I am somebody from an outside organization who is delivering this workshop that has a job and has had a lot of opportunities afforded to me throughout my life. So, when I'm coming into different spaces with people facing different intersections of barriers in their lives, I feel there has to be a reflection on that.

R2H reflects on these inequities and tries to offer food programming in a fun and dignified way. Indigenous food sovereignty is a topic R2H supports wholeheartedly as allies. Riley feels that "the best way forward, for now, is to listen, to show up for conversations instead of shrinking away from them." They said that it's in these moments of discomfort where the organization checks in with themselves to ensure they are representing themselves genuinely in this work and realizes the importance of "providing a platform to lift up voices that are not always heard. The conversation can be simply meeting people where they are, instead of expecting them to come to you."

Budgeting for food and making those food dollars stretch are often discussed during C4C classes. In the fall of 2019, I led a C4C session about cooking on a budget and how to "love-up" food hamper items to make them healthier and more palatable. Kim said she and the students "often talk about how you can't do everything with nothing," so in the class, we discussed ingredient substitutions and how to eat well if you don't have access to a fridge or a stove.

All the R2H staff members I interviewed spoke of the participants as loved family members, some of whom need more help than others. Kim said, "some of the [R2H program participants] ask for help with everything," at which point, the organization jumps in, connecting people to housing support, Ontario Works or other income support representatives, counsellors,

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help with court proceedings, and applying for identification cards such as social insurance numbers, and Indigenous status or health cards. Other people may not be ready to accept the support offered by the organization, though R2H staff carefully try to engage with these ‘family members’ to help. Sometimes, people fall through the cracks, which Kim says is heartbreaking, but “that’s the problem with taking people into your family. They become people you love and worry about, and if you don’t know if they’re ok, that is really hard.”

R2H staff is interested in developing more programming and efforts around social advocacy. In CCS programs, the staff are careful to approach food work through social and food justice lenses. The organization acknowledges that there are things people have had to live with their whole lives, such as questions of their race, background, or orientation, but having people from many walks of life come together to cook, learn, and share experiences is how they address some inequities in their programming.

Conclusion

Returning to the theme of connection and belonging, the organization has built dynamic, inclusive spaces, providing people with positive food experiences while building their self-worth. R2H values connectedness amongst people as the organization feels it is an effective strategy to help CCS participants to see themselves as an integral part of society. Also, R2H is working hard to be mindful and intentional in their approach, to incorporate cultural teachings into their CCS programming. R2H has thought of equity as a driving force behind programming ideas and funding applications, though has chosen not to engage in social justice topic instruction or advocacy work within CCS classes. In summary, R2H is doing necessary work in northwestern Ontario, using food as a connector, and supporting people to help themselves.

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The next chapter discusses ideas and concepts from my research, including the theme of connection which I found to be central to the work R2H does. I speak to the challenges R2H faces incorporating the teaching of equity in CCS. I also discuss how CCS can be deemed essential work, the ‘so what?’ of my research, and the contributions this thesis can make to the existing literature of CCS.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter discusses perspectives attained after reviewing the data collected and the scholarly literature about CCS. Here, I synthesize the contents of the Findings chapter concerning the research questions driving my thesis research. I also discuss questions that arose as I analyzed the data.

The findings chapter drew from more than just the interviews I conducted. In line with community-based research (CBR) design and thinking back to the time I had spent with CCS classes, I incorporated myself as a part of the research as a conversation of our collective experiences within the CCS, rather than simply relying on the interviews I conducted. Again, because of the public health restrictions of the pandemic, CCS programming ceased, and I was unable to continue my volunteering with the classes.

At the onset of this research, I wanted to explore how Roots to Harvest (R2H) attempts to use food to engage people and how objectives of culture and equity fit into the organization's CCS programming. At the very heart of R2H, food is a means to promote connection amongst individuals and communities. Using a strength-based approach to help people recognize and develop their own assets and competencies, and being mindful of social determinants of health (SDOH) affecting the people with which R2H works, the organization focuses on creating its own vibrant, thriving community of Punks, "the fierce warriors living life outside the boundaries...the risk-takers, the button pushers...who live life out loud," (Roots to Harvest, 2018, p. 11). To create these spaces, the organization has intentionally hired staff and sought out volunteers who embody its values in seeing people for who they are, without judgement or preconceived notions. Through this central theme of belonging, the organization can cultivate opportunities to learn, grow, and advocate for themselves, supported by a welcoming group

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environment. And it's because of this inclusive space, the organization can effectively use food to support the populations it serves, integrate culture into its programming, and address inequities.

Cooking together is a valuable backdrop for this work, as formal and informal learning occurs amidst flour and fresh vegetables. The epistemological framework of social constructivism aligns with experiential learning in CCS. It states that knowledge is built through social interactions and shared experiences within groups. Participants learn from each other and contribute to the group's learnings through shared anecdotes.

The three different R2H CCS programs I studied offer unique scopes using cooking to address culture and equity within each program's goals. Culture has been considered very carefully within each CCS program, allowing participants to teach elements of their heritage to other CCS participants and bring in community experts when appropriate. Facilitators build rapport with participants and help to guide their learning about differences encountered by providing opportunities for open dialogue within safe spaces. They are treating people fairly and using the kitchen as a unifying, equitable space matter to R2H. Equity is addressed quietly within the CCS. R2H attempts to mitigate SDOH to make CCS programming more accessible by offering financial incentives for attendance and covering transportation and childcare costs. The organization has not incorporated social justice teachings into their CCS programming, nor have they encouraged participants to become involved in advocacy work around relevant community issues.

Participation in CCS has been shown to positively impact household food insecurity, as participants bring food home to share after class. After CCS classes where I've volunteered, there has always been extra food prepared for anyone to take home. Like many in the literature,

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this CCS provides practical food skills training to its participants through experiential learning. Reading through the R2H CCS student program evaluation summary, many participants spoke of chefs and R2H staff teaching knife and butchery skills, recipe adaptation, and reading food labels. In addition, participants could learn from each other as they showcased dishes from their own cultures or spoke of experiences they had had working in professional kitchens.

Though some has been written on belonging and connection in CCS programs, I noted a literature gap referring to social gastronomy and advocacy efforts. I address this here regarding data collected from the case study of R2H.

Connection and Belonging

Feeling connection and belonging is a basic human need that positively impacts physical, mental, and social wellbeing (Allen et al., 2021). The literature speaks to the value of belonging through connections made amongst CCS participants. For example, Somali Bantu refugees found belonging in their new American locales or new Australians who felt proud to share their knowledge and culture with others in their community (Hand & Kaiser, 2019; Cutter-Mackenzie, 2009). Belonging can also be fostered through cooking together in reconnecting Indigenous people with their stolen culture, as seen in examples of youth in Brazil or a community in Manitoba (Baskin, 2008; Shukla et al., 2019). At the heart of everything that R2H sets out to accomplish lies connection. From my interviews and my experience volunteering with the organization, R2H believes in people and belonging. As Erin said, the organization “is human-centred, not food-centred, and that’s important.” This sentiment is true, as, without this connection to the youth and other community members R2H works with, conversations on deeper levels leading to mutual understanding and respect will likely not happen. And the more

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significant outcomes R2H is hoping for – i.e., building positive relationships between people and food, and themselves - will be hard-pressed to happen naturally, if at all. In the interviews I conducted, both participants and staff facilitators spoke to the significance of their relationships through the CCS.

R2H's organizational goals of building relationships, making food fun, and tailoring programming based on need are routinely met through thoughtful and intentional planning and implementation. The belief that people who feel more connected and valued will be more resilient and better able to make healthy life choices is completely reasonable despite their environments and situations. To enhance a sense of belonging, R2H checks in with program participants, makes sure quiet voices are heard and that everyone feels safe to be themselves. Having competent staff to plan and deliver programs and support is crucial, and from my research, I found that R2H is doing just that.

Respectful Relationships

Elder Marshall coined the phrase Two-Eyed Seeing, which refers to the benefit of viewing life and work with a combination of Indigenous ways of knowing with Western knowledge (Reid et al., 2020). He believes that through this lens, reciprocal, respectful relationships can best be forged and maintained. In speaking to the four R2H staff members, it was apparent that each one thought a lot about engaging in respectful conversations and participating in cultural training sessions to establish and maintain solid relationships with Indigenous people. As Elder Marshall stated,

Learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways

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of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all (Bartlett et al., 2015)

Utilizing a Two-Eyed Seeing approach could be valuable to R2H, as this guiding framework might improve the organization's ability to develop and maintain respectful relationships with Indigenous people. In practice, adopting this framework could be facilitated by adding additional BIPOC or newcomer positions to the organization's leadership team (either staff and/or Board of Directors). Also, assembling an Indigenous Advisory Circle of Elders and other knowledge keepers to help guide the organization in equitable programming, decision-making, and relationship-building going forward.

However, R2H also recognizes that Canadian non-profit organizations are, by their very nature, colonial, adhering to strict funding stipulations and government structures. R2H understands this and actively engages in decolonizing work by seeking self-training opportunities and consultations with Indigenous communities. Riley told me that "R2H staff members are comfortable with uncomfortable conversations, really listening to what is being said while paying attention to what's not." Kim and Riley both said that they know that difficult discussions like these mean unlearning and relearning to further reconciliation work.

However, as with many community organizations trying to navigate systems respectfully and evolve to meet community needs, R2H is a work in progress. To move forward in their decolonizing work and truly become an organization conscious of equitable relationships and decision-making, R2H could mandate specific training modules for staff to complete as they are hired on to the organization. Doing this might ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of the populations involved in R2H work. Also, the organization can consider adding BIPOC voices to their leadership team. By doing so, R2H may advance from having good intentions of

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working with diverse populations in northwestern Ontario to incorporate these different cultures' robust knowledge and viewpoints. And because of the large number of Indigenous people R2H works with, forming an Indigenous Advisory Circle can help guide the management team to support Indigenous voices within R2H's work. R2H can be held accountable to this Circle. In turn, the Circle can help R2H guide its decision-making, maybe implementing the guiding principles of Two-Eyed Seeing, which balances traditional Indigenous knowledge and worldviews with contemporary Western views (Bartlett et al., 2015).

Diversity and inclusion. R2H staff discussed their intention to be diverse and inclusive. However, literature has explained that using terms like “diversity” and “inclusion” usually points to a status quo within an organization, into which people about whom these very initiatives are directed must fit into the current workplace culture to thrive (Reese, 2020; Walker, 2019). To this point, Canada, and more specifically Thunder Bay, comprises a predominantly straight, non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2015, 2017b). This predominance is seen in R2H leadership staff, though there is some representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ community members on staff from my research. This spectrum of representation is relevant because, despite its intention to address and minimize it, a power imbalance may prevail as R2H works with various people. For an organization to be truly inclusive, the leadership team and staff should reflect the organization's diversity.

Social (Food) Movements, SDOH, and the Future of CCS

The concept behind modern social gastronomy was first introduced in 1903 when Chef Escoffier envisioned people of different social classes sitting and eating together at the same table (King, 2019; Disciples Escoffier International, 2020). From my research with the CCS at R2H, the organization practices this regularly. In each program, participants, staff, and

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volunteers sit down to eat together, to get to know one another through sharing stories over the meal they've just prepared together. The modern concept of social gastronomy has expanded in scope to include using the power of food to improve the lives of vulnerabilized people and generate social change (Navarro-Dols & González-Pernía, 2020; Ashoka, 2020).

Generating social change leading to equitable food systems requires addressing power imbalances through shifts in governing procedures and policies (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). Levkoe (2017) suggests this work is possible by developing alternative food initiatives (AFI), such as Indigenous food sovereignty, dignified food access, community gardens, and CCS programs. In my case study, I have found that R2H very much embodies the ideals of AFIs, as they've taken an active role as a proponent for the initiatives mentioned above. R2H's approach to AFI involves caring deeply for the youth with whom it works. Many of the quotes and anecdotes I have included from the research findings show that the organization has created a welcoming, familial environment for the R2H participants. Knowing the idea of "family" means different things to different people and can be challenging for some, staff explained that R2H's notion of family includes meeting people where they are, providing gentle nudges when needed, and stepping in if necessary. CCS participants told me they felt welcomed and understood. However, in the Findings chapter, much of the data points to R2H staff offering help and support to the CCS participants instead of giving them more agency. This statement leads to the question, does the protectiveness of R2H's family environment preclude the R2H CCS participants from making their own life decisions?

I think some of the youth fall comfortably into the wrap-around support system R2H offers, as evidenced when Kim said some people ask for "help with everything." The four staff members I spoke with talked about poverty and marginalization as underlying issues for many

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CCS participants. As pointed out in the literature review, living in poverty limits opportunity for choices, especially concerning what or how food is brought into the household or how time is spent (Fafard St. Germain & Tarasuk, 2018). Some of the CCS participants I interviewed experience marginalization due to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or mental health. There is a community navigator position at R2H that destigmatizes asking for help. This person refers program participants to agencies to assist with necessities like procuring health or status cards, income supports, housing, or counselling opportunities. The type of support that initially offers someone a soft place to land is a great place to start, especially if that person has been battling conditions that limit health and wellbeing their whole life. But, once a person has accessed these resources and feels grounded and safe, what happens next? R2H could improve their support system by educating CCS participants on advocating for themselves and their communities. Education of relevant social issues and encouragement of actionable items of CCS participants has proven to be successful in The Stop Community Food Centre (Maharaj, 2020; Levkoe & Wakefield, 2011). Possibly, R2H could offer programming that links social issues experienced by individuals to broader systemic and structural systems shared by many. While not all social problems may be addressed in this manner, barriers common to many R2H CCS participants can be used to plan the system-wide advocacy and engagement work that the organization addresses. Advocacy programming like this could help assure people experiencing similar issues they are not alone in their struggles. They do have agency over their lives, and together they can affect systemic change. Future development of this idea could employ program participants with experiential knowledge of advocacy programming to lead advocacy education and training sessions in a peer-mentoring way. Through this new direction of teaching civic

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engagement that R2H could continue its work on eradicating poverty, racism, and marginalization in Thunder Bay.

R2H hasn't called itself a social gastronomy enterprise. The organization is an AFI and part of a multi-sectoral food movement. With a little more emphasis on developing actions to engage in social justice issues as part of their programming, R2H will measure up to existing social gastronomic organizations such as The Stop in Toronto, actively involved in advocacy work (The Stop Community Food Centre, 2019).

Challenges to Incorporating Equity into CCS Programming

R2H has chosen not to directly speak about advocacy on social issues or encourage action on equity issues to participants in CCS programming. While this is a gap, it is an area that could develop in the future. northwestern Ontario communities can benefit from challenging inequality by taking unified agency on relevant issues and working toward more equitable social policy. Grassroots organizations like R2H are in an ideal position to do this, as they work directly with community members and are recognizable enough to hold the attention of policy and decision-makers. Also, the interviewees told me that while some staff members are proactive in seeking out learning opportunities, especially in BIPOC food work, R2H doesn't mandate specific cultural competency training. Not having organizational policies concerning training is problematic, as not every staff member has participated in these learnings. Administrative policies requiring staff to complete specific training modules or attend scheduled guest speaker events can be beneficial, as all staff will then have a baseline knowledge of cultures and social issues relevant to R2H's work.

Could CCS be Deemed Essential Work?

There is value in conducting additional research on what is believed to be “essential work” in social enterprise organizations to expand the idea that the work R2H does is essential (Farm to Cafeteria Canada, 2021). The phrase “essential work” has been used a lot during the COVID-19 pandemic, usually signifying people working in critical infrastructure sectors that “preserve life, health, and basic societal functioning”: utilities, health and safety, food, government, etc. (Public Safety Canada, 2020). Studies have illuminated the adverse effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on people’s mental health, citing isolation, financial loss, fear of uncertainties, and conflicting messages from authorities having detrimental psycho-social consequences on many (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Kumar & Nayar, 2020). Extended stay-at-home orders and mixed messaging around which goods and services are deemed essential have further heightened these repercussions (Storr et al., 2021).

Weaver (2020) argues that social enterprise organizations are vital for “addressing issues both created and exacerbated by this virus.” I wholeheartedly agree. The central theme in my research findings is belonging. Organizations aimed at creating connections between people while addressing dignified food access and increasing food security for those already made vulnerable by disrupted social determinants of health should be considered “essential work.” This idea of social gastronomy organizations being deemed essential work could be part of a larger conversation to inform public policy and funding models at many levels.

So What?

And now, we’ve come to the ‘so what’ of my research. Why does studying a community organization doing food work in northwestern Ontario matter? How will it add to larger conversations and the literature and practice around CCS?

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R2H has already expressed interest in learning what I've found during the organization's case study; I will share a presentation of the findings and subsequent recommendations to staff and the Board of Directors. Having third-party observations such as those found in this research may prove helpful to R2H governing bodies when reflecting and deciding on directions of organizational growth and development of future programming. In addition, other organizations of similar size and scope may also be interested in this research for these same reasons. R2H's program descriptions, successes, and opportunities for change presented here may provide some guidance for other organizations to consider their future objectives, strategic planning, and partnership ideas.

In addition, this research has the potential to make further in-roads and connections to food research to the north, Indigenous people, and reconciliation efforts. Northwestern Ontario is a geographically isolated area that houses many vibrant food initiatives within its diverse Indigenous communities (McLaughlin, Gagnon, & Ho, 2020). Further study and actions emerging from this thesis could foster reconciliation and healing endeavors, especially when engaging in community-based and participatory action research with First Nation communities. Here, the development and implementation of various CCS and other food-based initiatives, strategies, and projects can occur, while simultaneously learning and networking with involved communities, focusing on core Indigenous values and ways of working and knowing.

Contribution to Literature

From this research and other projects like it, it can be argued that CCS provide more than just practical hands-on food or budgeting skills and leftovers to take home; the literature reviewed for this thesis showed multiple co-benefits to cooking together and sharing meals. Food as an integral part of cultural traditions and teachings is important; CCS classes

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allow transferring knowledge between different people and different generations. This traditional knowledge transfer has been helpful to immigrants as they transition to their new lives and Indigenous people as they reconnect with their past. In terms of justice and equity, food has had a complex history. The literature demonstrates that CCS can help address systemic social issues and changes needed to work toward just food systems through various food justice movements. What can be added to the literature and broader conversations from my research is that belonging, and connection, are of utmost importance to our physical and mental wellbeing. Humans are social beings who thrive when they feel connected and part of a group. The past fifteen months of the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing protective measures have shone a harsh spotlight on the importance of togetherness and what happens when we are suddenly cut off from our support networks. This research speaks to the extent of belonging and how CCS can help people feel connected.

From the research presented there, R2H is a social gastronomy enterprise that uses food as a conduit for change, both at individual and systemic levels. However, there has been little study on the social gastronomy movement in academic circles; this research can contribute to that body of knowledge. Understanding Social Determinants of Health, the social, political, and economic factors influencing a person's life, is vital to consider when thinking of the importance of CCS programming. An SDOH like poverty has been shown in this research to be a common thread that holds many R2H CCS participants together. The findings in this thesis point to the benefits of CCS program participation to help alleviate SDOH like food insecurity, and social isolation, presenting opportunities for education and training preparing participants for employment.

Conclusion

This chapter has recounted the perspectives I gained from analyzing the data and reflecting on the literature I reviewed at the onset of this project. My research explored how R2H uses food preparation as a platform from which to engage people to speak to culture and equity within CCS programming. Through this work, I found that belonging and connection were the primary threads with which cooking, culture, and equity topics could be woven into the CCS tapestry. Engaging people through meaningful relationships provides a solid foundation for teaching and learning different cultures and social justice work.

This chapter addressed the challenges R2H faces in establishing respectful relationships, working with diverse populations, and encouraging advocacy work. In addition, I touched on work done by organizations such as R2H being considered “essential work.” I then explained how the findings could prove helpful to R2H and other organizations doing similar food work. After that, I described this research's contributions to the literature base and broader conversations about engaging people through food. I ended the chapter by outlining challenges R2H was facing concerning incorporating equity education and training into its CCS programming.

In the final chapter, I tie the research together, describing what I’ve learned and the limitations of this project, including how COVID-19 impacted my research. I conclude this thesis with ideas for future research and the contributions this research will make to theory and practice in CCS.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The preceding Discussion chapter analyzed my research findings and related to my research question and objectives. I found connection and belonging to be the most significant correlation to the work R2H does. From this base, education, training, and employment opportunities can be effectively forged with CCS participants. I outlined how R2H can incorporate more diverse perspectives into their leadership team and decision-making capacity, to be truly inclusive of everyone with whom the organization works. Also, I provided insight into ways R2H might increase advocacy education and training into their CCS programming to further enhance participants' self-efficacy. I presented information on the prospect of food work through connection and belonging being included in the conversation of what is deemed “essential work” and then spoke to my research contributions to R2H, other organizations, and the base of literature on CCS.

What did I learn?

In the beginning, I approached this research with the thought that I knew what I would find out. I have volunteered with R2H for the past six years and am familiar with how they operate. From my experience leading sessions in the CCS, I was aware of the different programs to incorporate and teach culture. I knew they worked with marginalized youth, and greeted everyone with smiles and hugs, and cared about the people with whom they had worked.

But what I wasn't prepared for was just how deep the thread of belonging and connection was woven into their very fabric of being. As stated in the literature review chapter, mental well-being is negatively affected when paired with higher stress levels, food insecurity, and poor social support and belonging (Martin et al., 2016). Having a sense of belonging has been linked

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to many benefits over a person’s lifespan, including increased mental and physical well-being, less stress, better social relationships, and satisfaction with life (Allen & Kern, 2017).

During my data collection, everyone I spoke with lit up, glowing when describing the warm family-like atmosphere R2H provides, enveloping everyone they encounter and how the staff genuinely care. Like with any family, there are rough patches and challenges to face, but they face them together, with many support systems and people in place to help. As Kim said, “It’s not all rainbows and unicorns,” but R2H is an organization that loves and accepts its community, warts, and all.

Figure 2 presents a word cloud I made from my data collection interview transcripts, and I believe it speaks volumes about the importance of what is at the heart of R2H: belonging and connection.

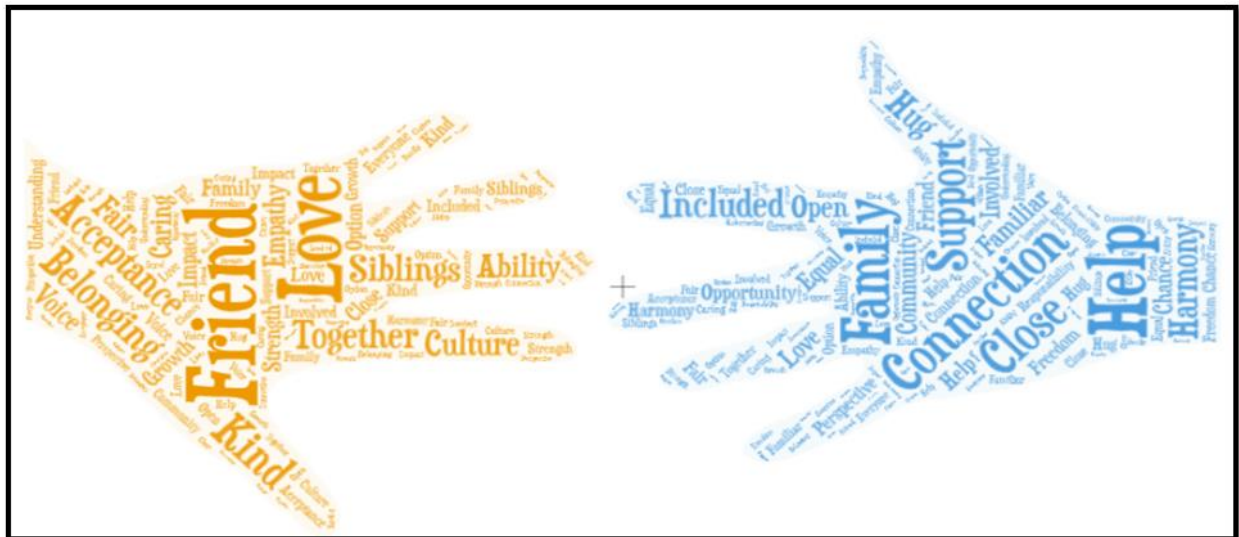


Figure 2. Word Cloud Made from Thesis Data Collection

On this foundation of inclusivity and understanding, R2H can build its organizational goals of engaging people by providing positive experiences with food and providing space for people to learn and grow. Various staff members and community experts come together to help

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CCS participants realize their potential and self-worth. As literature has stated, capacity building and empowerment of CCS participants can happen by learning new skills, leading to elevated self-worth and increased health and well-being of themselves and their communities (Community Food Centres Canada, 2018).

R2H incorporates culture into its CCS programming through formal and informal education; the organization provides some opportunities for cultural instruction and encourages CCS participants to share their experiences and knowledge with the groups. R2H addresses issues of inequity by utilizing funding to enhance CCS programming by offering financial support to CCS participants. Still, the organization does not promote advocacy and social justice efforts among CCS participants.

In all, I was pleased with the research project that I planned and executed, as it answered my research question and objectives asking how this CCS incorporated ideals of cooking, culture, and equity.

What's Missing?

When I began this research in the fall of 2019, I had specific ideas about what I would and could accomplish within the time constraints of a Master's degree. At that time, I did not know the world would change so quickly and drastically in March of 2020 due to a global pandemic. But change it did, forcing the direction and scope of my research to change as well. I wanted to use this space to address questions that may not have been answered within this study because of the limitations and public health restrictions of COVID-19.

My research would have benefitted greatly from my being able to participate more regularly in the CCS classes, to observe the interactions between those involved. Because of that

class involvement, the research would have been bolstered by potentially a larger study sample size, and wider demographic within.

Limitations of Research

Initially, I had planned to carry out this project quite differently. The public health restrictions and safety measures involved in managing the COVID-19 pandemic limited my research in several ways.

Firstly, I had planned to include multiple case studies in my research; sites in Minneapolis, Duluth, and Winnipeg had to be omitted from my research plan due to border closures and public health directives. Because of this, I was not able to gain perspectives from other organizations involved in this work. Insights into the successes and challenges experienced by other sites would have been valuable to present to each site to enhance their future growth and development. In addition, a larger sample size from multiple locations would have increased my learning of these topics and allowed for further contrast and comparison amongst participant experiences. Because I already have some volunteer experience with the organization and am familiar with their mandate, I was interested to learn more about how the organization and CCS programming operate. By focusing solely on R2H, I dug into how the organization attempts to engage people through food in Thunder Bay. This case study illuminated the importance of CCS programming to highlight and alleviate the strain from the SDOH common to many of the participants. This study has resulted in some solid recommendations to R2H to continue strengthening the organization's work in northwestern Ontario.

Secondly, due to Lakehead University's pandemic rules stipulating data collection be done remotely where appropriate, it was difficult to recruit participants for the study. The pandemic forced R2H to cease CCS programming. My research plan included getting to know

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CCS participants before starting my data collection by participating in more CCS classes. Observing interactions between group members first-hand would have been valuable when considering the research framework of social constructivism that I had chosen. However, relying on my involvement with R2H and study participants' recollections of group interactions was an integral part of my research.

Thirdly, I asked R2H staff to reach out to CCS participants for research participation on my behalf, but this was problematic for several reasons. At the time, R2H staff were very busy preparing and distributing emergency food bags for individuals and families in Thunder Bay. I felt bad about asking them to meet my research needs. R2H was gracious in reaching out to people on my behalf, but these were still in contact with the organization and had had positive experiences in the CCS. It would have enriched my research to be connected with others, including people who did not have positive experiences at R2H or were not still connected to the organization. In addition, recruiting and interviewing study participants in person (rather than through email and the Zoom platform) would have changed the dynamics of data collection and may have increased my sample size.

Though R2H has a significant percentage of Indigenous people participating in its CCS program, I did not interview anyone who identified as Indigenous. Because of this, I am concerned my research is lacking a critical voice. A large part of my research focused on the land-based learning of the FMF program, and it would have been very enriching to have first-hand information about the program from Indigenous people who participated in it.

Because of the strict limitations the global COVID-19 pandemic placed on this research, I focused on one organization only, as there were no other comparison sites available to be studied. This single site research resulted in this thesis becoming more like a program evaluation

than the multiple case study design I had originally designed. While this was not my original intention, there is still great value in providing this analytical assessment of the R2H programming. Including additional information and participants from other organizations would have allowed for comparing and contrasting the programs delivered and impacts felt in each one.

These limitations could be addressed in future research projects, ideas for which are listed below.

Future Research

Before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions forced border closures, I had reached out to the American Indian Community Housing Organization in Duluth, MN and the NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre in Winnipeg, MB, to be included as case studies in my research. These two social gastronomy organizations are doing similar work to Roots to Harvest and serve similar populations. The Winnipeg site is also part of the CFCC umbrella, of which I had wanted to learn more. Analyses of these two organizations would add interesting contributions to dignified food access literature and provide helpful information to them and other organizations involved in food work.

Including research of observing group interactions would have added beneficial evidence of learning occurring within group settings, adding to the true nature of community-based research. Future research could delve into this concept by including focus groups in the research plan or having the researcher participate in CCS programming alongside the study participants.

In addition, it would be invaluable to take a deeper dive into specific groups who have been involved with Roots to Harvest. For instance, to further R2H's decolonizing journey and strengthen community partnerships, it would be helpful to have perspectives of Indigenous people who have taken part in the Forest Meets Farm workshops, whether as students or

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knowledge keepers. Also, the cultural intricacies surrounding supporting Muslim women participating in Culture Kitchen are fascinating. Studying the women's transition to life in Canada would provide valuable insight into settlement organizations working with newcomers or other families considering moving to Canada. Also, interviewing R2H board members, funders, and community partners that work in close community partnership with the organization could add valuable insight, depth, and opportunity to provide meaningful recommendations to this and other similar food-based groups.

Also, studying impacts of SDOH on participants before and after participation in CCS could prove valuable, as could including an interview with the organization's community navigator that might shed insight on these considerations.

Future exploration in this area could focus more on critical reflection and research of CCS. For example, a Ph.D. researcher could pick up where I have left off; with additional funding and time, a broader scope or deeper dive could be implemented, and including more organizations in the study.

Finally, current discourse around how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to foodways and what happens when significant disruptions occur to these frail systems (Bisoffi et al., 2021; Dou et al., 2021). Research into the impact grassroots CCS could have on mitigating the spread of health events by improving immunity and recovery through nutrition while alleviating loneliness could assist in updated public health directives and better outcomes for the future.

Conclusion

This research has helped me understand R2H and how it incorporates cooking and food preparation with culture and equity, encouraging connection and a sense of belonging. Seen

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through a food systems lens, the work R2H does would not be possible without connection; culture and equity work is enhanced when people feel a part of a group. Belonging and connection are of utmost importance to people's physical and emotional wellbeing. This research speaks to the significance and benefits of feeling included and how CCS can help vulnerabilized, socially excluded people feel part of a community.

Though I recognize that R2H has invested a lot of energy into supporting participants, giving them a soft place to land upon joining the organization, there are opportunities to enhance advocacy and social justice work within its programming once people are settled. R2H promotes a strength-based approach in developing skills and self-efficacy, but also, teaching people about relevant social issues and encouraging action to address them can help further self-determination and independence. To complement its support systems, further the sense of belonging and connection, including social justice education and supporting peer-mentorship initiatives could help to make people feel less isolated, and more able to take agency in their own lives. Advocacy and engagement work can also affect systems changes, further spurring action to working toward broader social change.

At the Wild Game Event in October 2019, as I was encircled by community members teaching me traditional Ojibwe beaver butchering and preparation methods, I had no idea that that afternoon would spur me to explore food in a whole new way. At that point, I didn't know that I would be studying food preparation and its connection to learning about different cultures or themes of food justice. At that time, I welcomed the teachings I was receiving from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers about preparing wild foods from the Boreal Forest. I was learning about the significance of Indigenous food sovereignty in healing and reconciliation. I

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am grateful for the knowledge I gained that day and that I have now contributed to furthering the conversation of these topics and more in this thesis.

I have been a proud supporter of and volunteer with R2H for many years; I look forward to staying involved with the CCS, as it grows and develops, utilizing my practitioner and researcher skills, education, and contacts to move the learnings from my research forward.

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Appendices



Appendix A – Organization Information Letter

Information Letter

Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Alternative Collective Cooking Spaces

Dear Executive Director,

Your organization is being invited to participate in a research project to help me learn about the impacts of participation in cooking classes on issues of culture and equity. Taking part in this study is voluntary. [R2H: Being mindful of the relationship and ongoing projects Dr. Levkoe has with Roots to Harvest, please know that these will not be affected by your decision to participate (or not) in this study and that Rachel Globensky, and not Dr. Levkoe, will be the one to engage in the interview process with your staff and program participants.] Before you decide whether or not you would like to participate in this study, please read this letter carefully to understand what is involved. After you have read the letter, please ask any questions you may have. My contact details are at the end of this document.

What is this research about?

I am interested in how cooking classes and participation in a community organization help people explore their culture or learn about someone else's through traditional food practices. I'm also interested in grassroots social justice movements and how these food-based organizations encourage their members to participate in such endeavours. To that end, this project will explore how collective cooking spaces are incorporating the objectives of cooking, culture, and equity into their programming for the populations they serve so that I might learn how both program staff and participants view the importance of the inclusion of culture and equity in food-based programming. This research project is part of the fulfillment of my Master's degree in Health Sciences - with a specialty in Social-Ecological Systems, Sustainability, and Health.

What information will be collected?

I will be asking questions related to your participation in food-based programming at Roots to Harvest. The question will focus on your experiences in this program and some of the activities you have been involved with regarding cooking, culture, and equity.

What is being requested of me?

You are invited to participate in this research because you are involved with a collective cooking space at Roots to Harvest. You will be invited to participate in an interview to share your knowledge and perspectives about your experiences with the organization. The interview will be recorded, and I will be taking notes as we speak. I will ask you about demographic information to assist me in categorizing the participants.

Are there any benefits or risks I should be aware of?

Conducting this interview will help me understand how your organization has built cooking, culture, and equity into its programs and services. It will also help me understand the successes and challenges of such programs and services, which aims to help improve programming at your organization and improve collective cooking spaces more broadly. While there are very few perceived risks from participating in

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this research, I recognize that some questions may be perceived as sensitive, and you may not want certain information made available to me. There will be a small number of people being interviewed for this research, so while I will do everything in my power to keep your answers anonymous by generalizing any information you give me, there is a risk of your responses being attributed to you by others at your organization. Your participation is voluntary, and you are only being asked to offer information you feel comfortable sharing with me.

How should I expect to be treated?

This research aims to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity. Centrally, this means that in participating in this research, you should feel that you, and your contribution to this research, have been treated with respect. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all information offered will be treated in good faith. You are welcome to refuse to participate, withdraw from the research at any time and refuse to answer any of the questions asked without any negative consequences for yourself or your organization. All questions about the research, its aims and outcomes will be answered openly and honestly. While I retain final editorial control over what I've chosen to write, you are free to withdraw any information you have contributed at any stage by contacting me and indicating your wish to do so.

The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has approved this study. If you have any questions related to the research ethics and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

What will happen to the data after it is collected?

In all cases, nothing you say will be attributed to you individually unless you have specifically consented to this. Only the researchers will have access to the interview transcript and identifiable materials (including audio recordings, hand-written notes, and your consent form). All raw data, audio recordings and typing up of interviews will be encrypted and stored on password-protected computers and in locked filing cabinets for up to five years, and then destroyed. The final research results will be submitted as part of the thesis requirements.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Rachel Globensky at the email address below, to set up a time to link up for your choice of Zoom (or other video medium) or telephone interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lakehead University has restricted face-to-face interviews.

If you have further questions about these processes or feel uncomfortable with any aspect of them, please let us know as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your time and assistance,

Rachel Globensky
MHS student,
Specializing in Social-Ecological Systems, Sustainability, and Health
Health Sciences Department, Lakehead University
rcgloben@lakeheadu.ca

Dr. Charles Levkoe
Department of Health Sciences, Lakehead University
t. 807-346-7954 clevkoe@lakeheadu.ca



Information Letter

Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Alternative Collective Cooking Spaces

Dear Potential Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research project to help me learn about the impacts of participation in cooking classes on issues of culture and equity. Taking part in this study is voluntary. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, please read this letter carefully to understand what is involved. After you have read the letter, please ask any questions you may have. My contact details are at the end of this document.

What is this research about?

I am interested in how cooking classes and participation in a community organization helps people explore their culture or learn about someone else's through traditional food practices. I'm also interested in grassroots social justice movements, and how these food-based organizations encourage their members to participate in such endeavors. To that end, this project will explore how collective cooking spaces are incorporating the objectives of cooking, culture, and equity into their programming for the populations they serve, so that I might learn how both program staff and participants view the importance of the inclusion of culture and equity in food-based programming. This research project is part of the fulfillment of my Master's degree in Health Sciences - with a specialty in Social-Ecological Systems, Sustainability, and Health.

What information will be collected?

I will be asking questions related to your participation in food-based programming at Roots to Harvest. The question will focus on your experiences in this program and some of the activities you have been involved with in respect to issues of cooking, culture and equity.

What is being requested of me?

You are being invited to participate in this research because you are involved with a collective cooking space at Roots to Harvest. You will be invited to participate in an interview to share your knowledge and perspectives about your experiences with the organization. The interview will be recorded, and I will be taking notes as we speak. I will ask you about demographic information to assist me in categorizing the participants.

Are there any benefits or risks I should be aware of?

Conducting this interview will help me understand how your organization has built cooking, culture, and equity into its programs and services. It will also help me to understand the successes and challenges of such programs and services, which aims to help improve programming at your organization and improve collective cooking spaces more broadly. While there are very few perceived risks from participating in this research, I recognize that some questions may be perceived

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as sensitive, and you may not want certain information made available to me. There will be a small number of people being interviewed for this research, so while I will do everything in my power to keep your answers anonymous by generalizing any information you give me, there is a risk of your responses being attributed to you by others at your organization. Your participation is voluntary, and you are only being asked to offer information you feel comfortable sharing with me.

How should I expect to be treated?

This research aims to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity. Centrally, this means that in participating in this research you should feel that you, and your contribution to this research, have been treated with respect. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all information offered will be treated in good faith. You are welcome to refuse to participate, withdraw from the research at any time and refuse to answer any of the questions asked without any negative consequences for yourself or your organization. All questions about the research, its aims and outcomes will be answered openly and honestly. While I retain final editorial control over what I've chosen to write, you are free to withdraw any information you have contributed at any stage by contacting me and indicating your wish to do so.

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

What will happen to the data after it is collected?

In all cases, nothing you say will be attributed to you individually, unless you have specifically consented to this. Only the researchers will have access to the interview transcript and identifiable materials (including audio recordings, hand-written notes, and your consent form). All raw data, audio recordings and typing up of interviews will be encrypted and stored on password-protected computers and in locked filing cabinets for up to five years, and then destroyed. The final research results will be submitted as part of the thesis requirements.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Rachel Globensky at the email address below, to set up a time to link up for your choice of Zoom (or other video medium) or telephone interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lakehead University has restricted face-to-face interviews.

If you have further questions about these processes or feel uncomfortable with any aspect of them, please let us know as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your time and assistance,

Rachel Globensky
MHS Student,
Specializing in Social-Ecological Systems,
Sustainability, and Health
Health Sciences Department, Lakehead University
rcgloben@lakeheadu.ca

Dr. Charles Levkoe
Department of Health Sciences, Lakehead
University
t. 807-346-7954 clevkoe@lakeheadu.ca



Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Alternative Collective Cooking Spaces

Dear Potential Participant,

As an MHSc Candidate, Specializing in Social-Ecological Systems, Sustainability, and Health at Lakehead University, I will be conducting research on how collective cooking spaces combine objectives of cooking, culture, and equity within their organizations. Through this research, I will explore the successes celebrated and challenges faced in this area.

I am a certified chef and have worked and taught in many kitchens, including programming at various collective kitchen spaces. I'm interested in exploring how to make these programs better and more accessible to the participants.

As part of my research, I am seeking a [**program participant/staff member/volunteer**] to participate in the interview over the phone, via zoom, or at an agreed-upon local location. Your identity would remain confidential in any results unless you agree to be identified. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at rcgloben@lakeheadu.ca.

Sincerely,

**Rachel Globensky,
MHSc Student,
Specializing in Social-Ecological Systems, Sustainability, and Health
Health Sciences Department, Lakehead University
rcgloben@lakeheadu.ca**

Appendix D – Participant Recruitment Text

[Roots to Harvest logo]

Hello,

Roots to Harvest has been asked to assist in recruiting potential participants for a research study being held through Lakehead University. The title of the study is **Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Collective Cooking Spaces**.

I have attached the study Information Letter and Consent Form. It is your choice to participate. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Roots to Harvest, nor will we know if you participate or not (unless you choose to tell us).

We will be requesting a copy of the research results as we are interested in the study, but in no way will it identify you or any of the specific information you provide, unless you choose to be identified.

If you'd like to participate, please respond to the researchers directly. Their contact information is rcgloben@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

[Roots to Harvest staff]

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<p>What kinds of other people are part of the program with you?</p> <p>Does participating in this program have any effect on how you eat at home, with the people you live with, your family, etc.?</p>	
<p>Theme: Culture</p>	
<p>What kind of food do you cook here?</p> <p>Have you learned things about different cultures represented in the program?</p> <p>What are the connections: Have you met people from your particular cultural background, your home country, who speak your language, etc.? Or from other cultures?</p>	<p>Do you like them? Is this the kind of food that you grew up eating? Do you associate it with your culture, family, birthplace, identity? How? Do you have any say in what gets prepared?</p> <p>Can you give me an example of something that you've cooked here and how it's meaningful to you?</p> <p>What cultures? how are they represented? Through interacting with the other participants here? Have you taught other participants about your culture's food? Examples?</p> <p>From other cultural backgrounds? What have you learned from the people here?</p>

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Theme: Equity	
<p>What social issues are important to you and the community?</p> <p>Does the cooking program address or find solutions to some of these issues, for you? Your community?</p> <p>How do feel about these issues after participating in the cooking program?</p>	<p>(Poverty / racism / settler-colonialism / food security / housing / education)</p> <p>How are these issues talked about in the program? Do you think there could be more integration of equity issues in the program if there are not?</p> <p>(Group discussions / Actions taken / Participants asking for/offering help)</p> <p>How? Examples? Or: maybe some of the connections to other people, programs/initiatives that come from the cooking program?</p> <p>Has it changed your thoughts or actions about them? How so? (Attending meetings, social media, volunteering, learning more, seeking/giving help, etc.)</p>
Demographics	
<p>How would you describe your gender?</p> <p>What is your age group?</p> <p>What is your highest level of education?</p> <p>What is your work status?</p>	<p>M / F / Other / Prefer not to answer</p> <p>under 16 /16-30/31-50/50+</p> <p>No formal education/ HS/ College/ Trade school/ Bachelor’s degree / Graduate degree</p> <p>Full time/ Part time/ Self-employed /Student (or intern)/ Unemployed & looking for work /Unemployed & not looking for work / Retired</p> <p>Canada? If not, when did you arrive?</p>

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<p>Where were you born and where did you grow up?</p> <p>Languages spoken/written?</p> <p>What's your family status?</p>	<p>Do you live alone? Who lives with you? What's their relationship to you?</p>
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Organization Volunteer/Staff Questions

Questions	Probes / Follow-Ups
What programs do you lead or help with here?	
Why do you work/volunteer here?	Prior participant? School requirement? Wanted to be involved? need a job?
What kind of training do you have to work here?	Cultural safety? Cooking? Food safety?
What are the goals of your program?	What skills/learning/objectives are you focusing on?
Tell me about a typical day in the program?	Do you plan the curriculum? Brainstorm with participants to see what they want to cook/talk about? Guests in from the community?
Thinking about some of your participants, do people get along with each other?	Have you seen social connections being made? Tell me if they have helped each other - maybe overcome social isolation/anxiety, learned about social issues, taught about things in their culture?
How does the program identify/understand the needs of its participants?	How is programming tailored to meet the needs of those participants? Examples?
What major social issues have been identified as important to the program, the community, and the participants?	Have you found ways to reflect those issues in the cooking program? Examples?

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How does participating in the program affect participants in terms of these issues?	Strategies, stories, examples? Connections to people, other organizational programs and other initiatives
What more would you like to see the organization do to encourage social justice and action for the cooking program participants?	Facilitate meetings? Organize events?
Have you noticed ways in which participants have been able to take action on social justice issues because of the program?	Stories, examples?



Appendix G: Research Approval Certificate

Research Ethics Board
t: (807) 343-8283
research@lakeheadu.ca

December 24, 2020

Principal Investigator: Dr. Charles Levkoe
Student Investigator: Rachel Globensky
Health and Behavioural Sciences\Health Sciences

Lakehead University

955 Oliver Road

Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. Levkoe and Rachel:

Re: Romeo File No: 1468351

Granting Agency: N/A

Agency Reference #: N/A

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "Exploring Cooking, Culture, and Equity in Collective Cooking Spaces".

Ethics approval is valid until December 24, 2021. Please submit a Request for Renewal to the Office of Research Services via the Romeo Research Portal by November 24, 2021 if your research involving human participants will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Access the Romeo Research Portal by logging into myInfo at:

<https://erpwp.lakeheadu.ca/>

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristin Burnett".

Dr. Kristin Burnett
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/sw