

Beyond Food Banks

Includes:
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Beyond Food Banks

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1. Acknowledgments

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Thirdly, we would like to thank OPIRG for allowing us to be a part of their organization and always making us feel welcome. Taking part in this evaluation was a great learning experience. It forced us to look at the issue of food security within our community of Peterborough and we cannot thank you enough for the opportunity.

Finally we would like to thank Matt Davidson and Jesse Whattam who were willing to meet with us countless times and answer numerous questions about the entire history of OPIRG. We hope that this report is useful for the future of OPIRG and more specifically, the Food Cupboard in the present and future.

2. Acronyms

OPIRG - Ontario Public Interest Research Group

KFS - Kawartha Food Share

TCCBE- Trent Centre for Community-Based Education

3. Executive Summary

This research paper was completed for the Food Cupboard run by the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) in Peterborough as a Community Based Education project in Trent's fourth year International Development Studies course titled "Assessment of Development Projects". The project was facilitated by the Trent Centre for Community Based Education and completed by two fourth year IDS students in order to assess whether recently planned changes made to OPIRG Food Cupboard had been implemented, to what extent, and whether they had the impact that was intended. Paired with these questions, was the additional analysis of whether or not OPIRG's Food Cupboard could remain sustainable.

The report provides a background of poverty and unemployment in Peterborough and discusses how the need for services such as a Food Cupboard is high. An overview of Food Banks in Canada is given. This provided a foundation for the rest of our report, which revolves around OPIRG's Food Cupboard.

A variety of research methods were employed to come to conclusions regarding the Food Cupboard. We conducted two days of observations at the Food Cupboard as well as the food pick up spot at Kawartha Food Share (KFS). This helped us understand the daily functioning of the Food Cupboard to a greater extent. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the current OPIRG coordinator and student Food Cupboard coordinator. In addition, we conducted a projection diagram with the two current OPIRG staff members and the past student Food Cupboard coordinator.

Our main finding was that the changes that were to be implemented as part of the Food Cupboard Changes Chart (see below) have not been applied consistently. There

have been vast improvements in the sense of community within the Food Cupboard. However, changes that would make the Food Cupboard more sustainable and a more reliable source of food in Peterborough are not being implemented consistently and this needs to be addressed.

OPIRG's Food Cupboard has been open to Trent students and the local community for a number of years and is a needed and welcome resource given the large number of visitors the Cupboard has monthly. While OPIRG has admirably devoted both volunteer and staff time to making the Food Cupboard a success, the findings of this report suggest more can be done in focusing action and resources on increasing the impact of sustainability of the Food Cupboard. OPIRG needs to reassess what can actually be done within the Food Cupboard while considering their location is Peterborough and the limited funding they receive. OPIRG is an organization, which has a large scope and needs to refocus its attention on the Food Cupboard since it is their main priority.

4. Introduction

This report will be focused on the Food Cupboard managed and run by Ontario Public Research Interest Group - OPIRG - in Peterborough, Ontario. The Food Cupboard model is based on providing food to people in an anti-oppressive way. This is done by not asking for financial information from those who are in need of the resources provided by the Food Cupboard. When you visit a Food Bank in Ontario you are required to provide photo identification, proof of address and proof of monthly income and expenditures (Ontario Association of Food Banks, Frequently Asked Questions, 2012). However, because the Food Cupboard is a member of Food Banks Canada, every year in March they have to participate in the annual Hunger Count. The Hunger Count is a “comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada, and recommendations for change” (Food Banks Canada, 2013). The Hunger Count requires each food related organization to fill out a survey with a variety of questions about the clientele that the organization serves (Food Banks Canada, 2013).

OPIRG was established in 1976 and is a non-for profit organization, which is “committed to research, education and action on social justice and environmental issues” (OPIRG, 2014). OPIRG runs numerous programs including the free market, documentary series, green dishes, dish lending program, research projects and the Food Cupboard.

The aspect of OPIRG that is the specific focus of this evaluation is the Food Cupboard, and the changes that were implemented in response to the Food Cupboard Changes Chart created in August 2013. The Food Cupboard was started in 1999 and was located at Trent. It was originally intended for Trent University students who were at risk

for needed services such as a food bank. The Food Cupboard was later moved to the basement in Sadleir House located on George Street in Peterborough, Ontario. In 1999 the Cupboard was very small, open 24 hours a day and was not monitored by any OPIRG staff or volunteers. Currently, the Food Cupboard is serving anywhere from 750- 1000 people per month, both involving Peterborough community members and Trent University students; it has become the fourth largest food provider in Peterborough (Personal Communication, October 8, 2013).

Research Questions

- Have the recent changes that came out of the review done in August 2013 been implemented?
- Have the changes had the impact that was intended?
- Are the changes sustainable?

For many people of a younger generation, it seems as though food banks have long been a societal norm. While food banks are now an entrenched reality of Canadian culture they have only been around since the early 1980's in response to the economic recession (Saul & Curtis, 2013). They were designed to be a temporary fix until the recession passed and people could stand on their own again. However, the number of food banks is growing every year in Canada. In 2013 alone, 900,000 people used food banks every month in Canada (Food Banks Canada, 2013).

The difficulty with sustaining food banks is that they rely on donations. With little to no control on the types of donations that arrive, food banks often receive donated food with very little nutritional value or food that is highly processed. Those who use food banks are expected to accept these less-than- healthy handouts and this often results

in a loss of dignity and only creates more social inequality. Food banks are a band-aid solution to a problem that will never be solved unless the root causes of food bank use are addressed. Many of the issues which cause people to turn to food banks in times of need are directly related to government policies concerning minimum wage in addition to biases and judgments that people have towards those who use food banks and the welfare system. The problem stems from the neo-liberal capitalist system under which much of our world currently operates. Lack of jobs and a minimum wage which is not on par with the cost of living need to be addressed in order to end food bank use. Food is a political issue requiring political reform. This is a huge task that cannot be solved overnight, or even over numerous years. In light of this, many towns and cities are moving towards a food cupboard or food center model. Nick Saul states that The Stop in Toronto is different from a food bank because “The Stop uses food to help the people it serves organize, to create change, to understand poverty and to fight it” (Butler, 2013). Food Centers are about more than simply giving a handout; they are about creating a space where people can come together around food and talk about the system and the root causes as to why they need to use a Food Cupboard’s services in the first place.

Peterborough, Ontario is no exception to poverty and unemployment, having the third highest unemployment rate out of the 33 largest urban centers in Canada (Wedley, 2013). This rate is extremely high for a city the size of Peterborough and shows how strong a need there is for services such as food banks. Kawartha Food Share provides food to 36 Food Banks in Peterborough (Kawartha Food Share, 2014).

During the summer of 2013, OPIRG initiated a review of the Food Cupboard program. Having grown to be the fourth largest provider of food in Peterborough since

its inception in 1999, the Food Cupboard has become an important service for many people who are food insecure in Peterborough. The OPIRG board, however, deemed the program to be unsustainable in its current state, and was critical of the Food Bank/Charity model of service provision. The review of the Food Cupboard was designed to support a transition towards what we are calling a Food Centre model, which will hopefully create a more dignifying and sustainable program. The Food Cupboard Review was completed in late August and OPIRG attempted to initiate numerous recommendations. The purpose of this project is to analyze and evaluate the changes made to the Food Cupboard to determine if it is successfully meeting the target goals set by OPIRG and if not, why not. The project will identify potential next steps in the transition to a Food Centre.

5. Evaluation Description

A large part of what OPIRG does for the community is the provision of a Food Cupboard that can be accessed by anyone in the Peterborough area. The Food Cupboard is different from a food bank as it does not require a person who is in need to fill out any forms or provide any personal information in order to access the food available. The purpose of this project is to analyze and evaluate the changes made to the Food Cupboard to determine if they are successfully meeting OPIRG's target goals, and if not, why if not. In August 2013 small changes were made in the Food Cupboard such as providing children with toys to play with as their parents or caregivers use the Food Cupboard. Larger changes were to be implemented over time. The project will identify potential next steps and recommendations for the organization to consider. In addition, we will offer new insights and recommendations to the Food Cupboard.

- Our report and evaluation is summative. A summative evaluation results in a

concise report, which is detailed and meant for a program administrator (Morris, 1987). The report contains charts and graphs in order to create a clear and concise message (Morris, 1987). Our report will be provided to the coordinator of OPIRG for his use, along with the other staff, volunteers and the Board. We will be using a graphing technique from Social Analysis Systems (SAS) to provide some visuals that deliver a clearer message.

- We hope our report will offer new insight about the Food Cupboard to the OPIRG Board, staff and volunteers. They will be our primary users. A primary user(s) is/are the individuals to whom you are providing the information to (Morris, 1987). They will decide what to do with our report and recommendations. We will make recommendations and identify potential next steps for them to take to potentially better their Food Cupboard. Our recommendations will help them reflect on the changes chart, realize their capacity as an organization and, ultimately, will benefit the users of the Food Cupboard. The users of the Food Cupboard are secondary users, meaning that they are affiliated with or have an interest in our program of evaluation (Morris, 1987).

6. Methodology

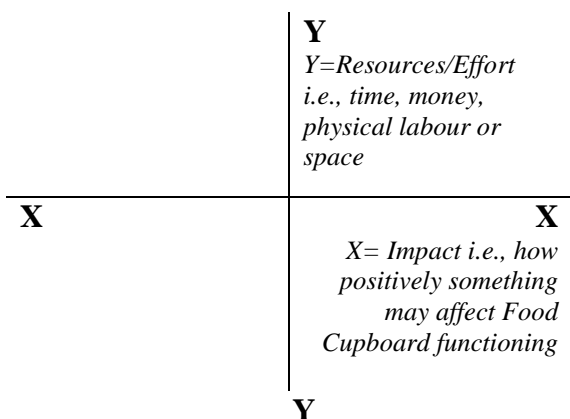
This evaluation used a variety of qualitative research methodologies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the OPIRG coordinator and the person occupying the student position (see appendices- questions); a SAS projection diagram was done; and an observation of how the Food Cupboard is run was carried out. We were unable to conduct surveys, questionnaires or interviews with food cupboard users as OPIRG requested. These challenges will be explained later.

6.1 Semi-structured interviews

We set up interview times with both participants separately and asked them a series of questions surrounding past Food Cupboard changes or lack of. Questions surrounding the daily operations of the Food Cupboard and the tasks devoted to staff, coordinators and volunteers were also asked (see appendices). We conducted semi-standardized interviews with both OPIRG staff members. This means starting with “a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress...the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions” (Berg, 2000). We took detailed notes on a laptop. The notes will be destroyed once the report is completed.

6.2 SAS Projection

We conducted a projection diagram with some of the OPIRG staff. Projection diagrams are a part of the Social Analysis Systems, which are participatory action research methods (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). We created a diagram (see below).



The diagram we created has an x and a y-axis that meet in the middle. We asked both past and present OPIRG members to plot the different changes from the Food Cupboard Changes Chart in relation to the amount of resources/effort they would require versus the amount of impact they would have. Traditionally the y-axis is positive and negative factors and the x-axis is weaker and stronger impacts (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). In our case we changed the y-axis to represent resources/effort and the x-axis to represent impact. In terms of the y-axis, resources can mean time, money, physical labor or space. In terms of the x-axis impact refers to how positively something may affect the Food Cupboard functioning. The exercise is similar to a cost-benefit analysis and in the words of Weiss, we wanted to “attempt to identify the benefits of a program, both tangible and intangible; by looking at the costs of conducting the program, the direct and indirect is an indication of the return that society is getting from its investment in the program” (Weiss, 1972). We assigned a letter number combination to each of the changes (see appendix -Food Cupboard Changes Chart). Each projection diagram was done individually, without the presence of the other OPIRG staff or volunteers to avoid pressure or influence. We analyzed these graphs and our results will be discussed in our results section.

6.3 Observation

Observation was another qualitative research method, we used for data collection. Observation is a “detailed description of people’s activities, behaviors, actions and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience” (Patton, 1990). As evaluators we felt that we had to participate in the Food Cupboard process fully in order to understand many of the issues

that occur in running such a large food provider. For Patton, “participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” because “participant observation is the most comprehensive of all types of research strategies” (Patton, 1990). We felt we would gain further understanding into the Food Cupboard changes chart by interacting with the Food Cupboard personally. We participated in the Food Cupboard, as regular clients would while taking detailed notes of what was occurring during that time. This was very interesting and informative to our understanding of what really occurs in the Food Cupboard on a daily basis. We took part in picking up food for the Cupboard from the Kawartha Food Share - a form of observation that contributed to our understanding of the Food Cupboard.

7. Challenges

- We were mainly in contact with the OPIRG coordinator, our primary user, throughout our evaluation. He informed us that we would be not be able to carry out interviews, surveys and questionnaires with the users of the Food Cupboard. This was because in recent times OPIRG conducted its own surveys and questionnaires with the users of the Food Cupboard and he did not want to be invasive. The Hunger Count is conducted annually requiring more information from the users. As an anti-oppressive organization OPIRG did not want to demand more information from its users.
- There was an ethical challenge we faced when undertaking our observation of the Food Cupboard. Although we, the evaluators, are both students, one of the groups that use the Food Cupboard, we still had an

uncomfortable feeling in taking food from the Cupboard when there are possibly people who are in more need of it than we were.

8. OPIRG Background

8.1 Goals of the Food Cupboard Changes Chart

The Food Cupboard Changes Chart was created in August 2013 (see below). After a review of the Food Cupboard was done in May 2013 the coordinator of OPIRG stated that the Food Cupboard was operating in excess of its sustainable capacity (OPIRG 2013). Following the review done in May there were numerous brainstorming sessions and meetings between the OPIRG board, employees and volunteers to address numerous issues, including volunteer sustainability, logistics of the Food Cupboard, space, volunteer interactions and anti-oppression practices (OPIRG 2013). The chart was made to address these issues. The Food Cupboard Changes Chart is split into immediate changes, medium-term changes and long-term changes. The immediate changes were expected to be implemented by December 2013, medium within a year and long term an undefined time period (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). There were eleven immediate changes, seven medium changes and six long-term changes. By implementing these changes OPIRG was hoping to improve the Food Cupboard by attempting to create more of a Food Center model and address the issue of overcapacity. A Food Center model attempts to provide more healthy food to users while simultaneously maintaining dignity, building health and community while challenging inequality (The Stop: Mission, 2014).

Food Cupboard Changes

Immediate (1)	Medium-Term (2)	Long-Term (3)
A) Standardized food delivery time to no more than 2 hours prior to program start ✓	A) Explore other food delivery options ×	A) Continue to monitor the hours the food cupboard is open (child friendly?) ×
B) Create children's station in waiting room ✓	B) Develop conflict resolution policy ◆	B) Develop capacity for fresh food donation/growing system × - Grow a Row
C) Clear communication of projected numbers to volunteers in basement prior to food distribution beginning ✓	C) Establish a standardized progressive discipline procedure ◆	C) Make refreshments available in waiting room ×
D) Make an Open/Close sign for the Free Market which will be hung on the banister ✓	D) Create communication board for within waiting room ✓	D) Develop workshops and other programming ×
E) Create a standardized incident record and complaint procedure ◆	E) Update Volunteer Agreement ×	E) Make improvements to the physical capacity of the Food Cupboard × (fridge and freezer space)
F) Develop educational posters/pamphlets ×	F) Form a food Centre Steering Collective ×	F) Establish a Food Centre AGM ×
G) Develop Food Centre newsletter ✓	G) Continue to develop a partnership with Nourish Peterborough to move towards a Peterborough Food Centre network ×	
H) Mandate anti-oppression training for all volunteers ×		
I) Determine the new name for the Food Centre with the community ×		
J) Communicate and implement Community Rules and Reminders ×		
K) Continue to develop operation procedures ◆		

Legend:

✓- has been implemented

◆- in process of implementation

×- has not been implemented

The Food Cupboard Changes Chart, which was created in August of 2013, was designed and inspired by The Stop, a community food center in Toronto. The Stop's mission is "to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community and challenges inequality" (The Stop: Mission, 2014). The Stop is more than a food bank; it offers a wide range of programs that address poverty,

oppression, sustainable food systems, and healthy beginnings for expecting mothers (The Stop: Mission, 2014). The review that took place over the summer of 2013 was designed to help move the Food Cupboard towards a Food Centre model, which will help in moving away from a “band-aid” solution. The review looked more broadly at what could be done to improve the Food Cupboard and in addition, OPIRG hoped that these changes would be more dignifying and sustainable (Personal Communication, October 8, 2013). However, since those initial meetings about changing the Food Cupboard, the staff at OPIRG has now realized that the goals that the Food Cupboard Changes Chart suggested were very ambitious and that OPIRG does not have the capacity to meet the goals. Further, the chart did not reflect the crisis that the Food Cupboard was actually going through at the time (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). The crisis entailed OPIRG’s Food Cupboard running over its capacity. These results will be discussed at further length later in the report.

One of the main issues with both food banks and with food cupboard systems is that they are created to distribute food to those in immediate need and are only meant to be a temporary solution. However, as the result of many factors, including rising unemployment and the increased cost of food, food banks and food cupboards are turning into permanent solutions for many of the clients. The same can be said for OPIRG’s Food Cupboard, as we observed that it was the same people who were consistently using the Food Cupboard each week.

8.2 Clients involved in the program

When the Food Cupboard was opened in 1999, it was originally created to serve Trent University students only. When a student faced a food emergency the Food Cupboard would be open all the time, unmonitored and completely anonymous (Personal

Communication, October 8, 2013). However, since OPIRG is committed to its social justice mandate, no one was turned away if they were in need of food, and eventually more community members were accessing the Food Cupboard than Trent students (Personal Communication, October 8, 2013). At this time, OPIRG also found that the Food Cupboard was being emptied quickly, eventually resulting in the regulation of Food Cupboard hours as well as the monitoring of the cupboard by OPIRG staff and volunteers (Personal Communication, October 8, 2013).

Currently, the Food Cupboard is open twice a week for a total of six hours, and clients are allowed to access the Cupboard once a week. From OPIRG's Food Cupboard report in 2013, the following numbers can be drawn about the Food Cupboards users. In March of 2013:

- 320 adults were served (18 years or older)
- 124 of them were women
- 12 of them seniors
- 13 were post secondary students
- 163 children were served (under 18 years)
- 230 households were served (Hunger Count Survey OPIRG, 2013).

In addition, 73 separate households reported that their primary source of income was from welfare, and 62 reported that it was from provincial disability support (Hunger Count Survey OPIRG, 2013). It is clear that most of those seeking the Food Cupboard are experiencing financial hardships.

8.3 Characteristics of the Program

There are numerous materials and resources that are a part of the Food Cupboard and its daily operation. The Food Cupboard is open on Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. and Fridays from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. Clients are allowed to access the Cupboard once a week on either day.

Resources for Food Cupboard

- Physical Space
- Food
- Funding
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Vehicle

It is clear that the most substantial material necessary to the Food Cupboard is the physical space. The Food Cupboard is run out of Sadleir House and the food that is supplied is mainly through Kawartha Food Share along with some donations. The issue of space has come up over the past ten years leading to a second Food Cupboard location opening then closing at Trill College (the demand for the Cupboard has grown in Peterborough). When the Cupboard is open it takes up a large portion of the main floor on Sadleir House and is run out of the basement. This space is currently used to put fresh fruit and vegetables out when the Food Cupboard is open. Sadleir House is planning on doing basement renovations in the near future and have communicated that once the renovations are complete, OPIRG will not be able to take over the basement hallway space. The space is a huge area of concern for OPIRG as they will have to make a

decision as to whether or not Sadleir House will continue to be an appropriate option for the Food Cupboard location.

In addition to the physical space needed to operate the Food Cupboard, the food is clearly a major material for this program. OPIRG has been a member of Kawartha Food Share since the beginning of the Food Cupboard. Through the Fair Share Agreement with Kawartha Food Share, the Food Cupboard is entitled to one full food order per month; however, they have been receiving double the amount in order to meet the demand (Personal Communication, October 8, 2013). This again, is not a sustainable situation for OPIRG or Kawartha Food Share.

One paid student who is the Food Cupboard and Free Market coordinator runs the Food Cupboard. This position is available on a yearly contract, usually filled by the same student for two years in a row. In addition to the one paid position, the student coordinator relies heavily on the many volunteers and the coordinator to help run the Food Cupboard.

The main source of funding that OPIRG receives comes from the Trent University student levy. In 2012 OPIRG received \$72,550.00 from the levy. Other grants, donations, sponsorships and revenue along with the levy resulted in a total income of \$89,396.04. The net expenses of OPIRG were \$81,409.90 for the 2012-2013 year (OPRIG Profit & Loss, 2014). During the 2012-2013 year OPIRG spent \$1,106.31 on the Food Cupboard and the Free Market. OPIRG also receives donations in the form of cash or resources that are for immediate use.

Another resource that is needed for the Food Cupboard to run is access to a vehicle to pick up the food orders from Kawartha Food Share. This resource is a main

area of concern for the Food Cupboard's daily function as the burden falls on one volunteer. This volunteer has to use her own vehicle to make two or three trips to pick up the food at KFS and drop it off back at the Food Cupboard. There have been many instances of her vehicle breaking down; resulting in delays in the Cupboard's opening. This is a major concern that has direct implications on the sustainability and reliability of the Food Cupboard. However, this matter is not in OPIRG's control due to the nature of the organization being run by volunteers rather than paid staff.

8.4 Staff and others involved in the Program

OPIRG is run by two paid staff - the coordinator and the Food Cupboard and Free Market Coordinator (the student position) that is responsible for the running of the Food Cupboard. The rest of the people who work within OPIRG are volunteers or board members donating their time. The Food Cupboard is a main priority of OPIRG Peterborough (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). The Food Cupboard is primarily the responsibility of the student position with assistance from the coordinator, board members and volunteers. The coordinator of OPIRG oversees all activities involving the Food Cupboard as well as the other programs run by OPIRG. The two paid staff are responsible for leveraging resources for the program, delegating staff resources, doing occasional administrative tasks, writing grants, communicating/negotiating with Kawartha Food Share, communicating with Sadleir House and making sure everything is running smoothly and people are happy (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). The student position involves overseeing activities in the Food Cupboard, socializing with people in the waiting room, conflict resolution, maintaining contact with Kawartha Food Share, attending the Kawartha Food Share member agency meetings, coordinating the food, coordinating the volunteers/board members, planning events and organizing

volunteer appreciation activities (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). The running of the Food Cupboard and other programming relies heavily on volunteers. Volunteers are responsible for numerous tasks including food pick up, administrative tasks, office work, handing out the food and helping out in the waiting room. They also assist the coordinator and the student with daily responsibilities for the Food Cupboard and other programs run by OPIRG. The Board of OPIRG is responsible for budget, hiring, specific events, policy review, contract negotiations, volunteer coordination and outreach (OPIRG Annual Report 2014). When someone is given a position on the board they dedicate 2-3 hours a week of service to OPIRG, commit to 1-2 years on the board, attend the board retreat, training, bi-weekly two hour meetings, and participate in committees and board portfolios (OPIRG Annual Report 2014). The Board's recommendations and decisions are given to the OPIRG coordinator who then passes them along to the staff and volunteers (Personal Communication, March 7, 2014). The Board of Directors are elected each year at the Annual General Meeting.

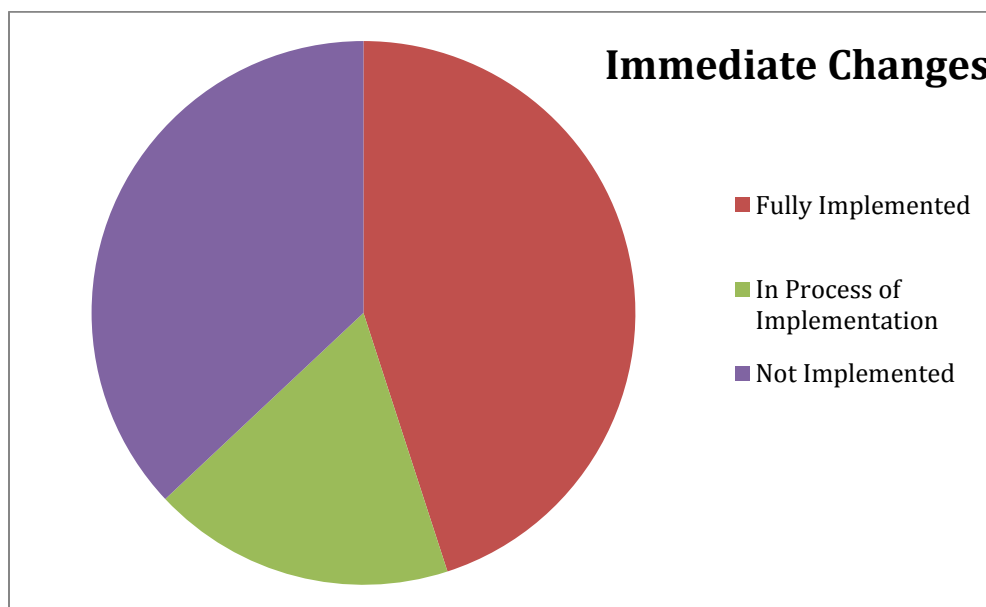
In order to understand the current context, it is important to understand the history of OPIRG. It is also helpful in terms of making recommendations because we can see where the issues have come from over the past ten years.

9. Results

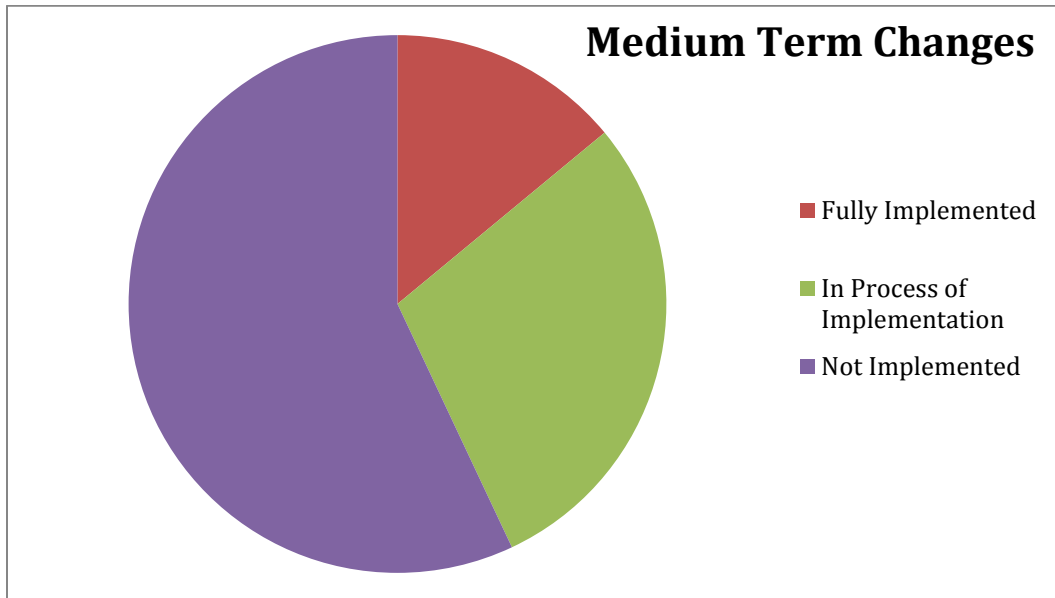
9.1 Semi-structured Interview Results

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted with OPIRG's coordinator and the student Food Cupboard coordinator helped us understand many of the issues going on within the Food Cupboard and why the Food Cupboard Changes Chart was completed in the summer of 2013. The results of our interviews have been discussed throughout this report.

In our interview with the coordinator of OPIRG we were able to find out exactly how many of the changes on the Food Cupboard Changes Chart (see appendix) had been fully implemented. We found out that some had been started but were not fully implemented. Some of the changes had not been implemented at all. Of the immediate changes (See appendix- First column of the Food Cupboard Changes Chart) 45% of the changes had been fully implemented, 18% were in the process of implementation and 37% of the changes had not begun their implementation (please see graph below).

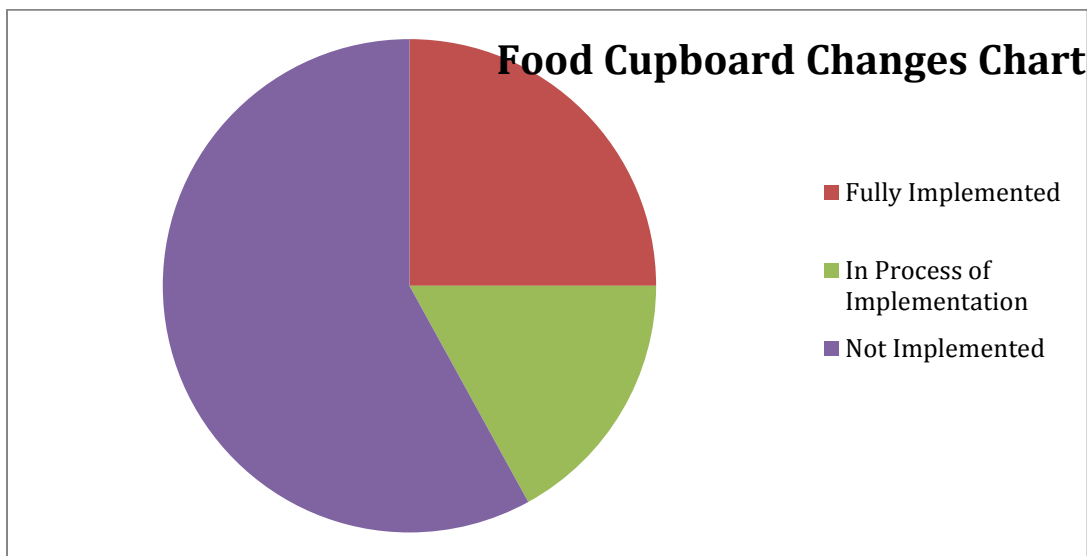


Of the medium term changes 14% of the changes had been implemented, 29% had begun their implementation and 57% of the changes had not been implemented (see graph below).



For the final column, the long term changes, 100% of the changes had not been implemented.

This means, in total, 25% of the changes on the Food Cupboard Changes Chart had been implemented, 17% of the changes had been partially implemented and 58% of the changes had not begun implementation at all (see graph following).



The overall lack of changes may be explained by the fact that the chart was completed under rushed circumstances and was not fully thought out, which was revealed during our semi-standardized interview with OPIRG's coordinator.

9.2 SAS Diagram Results

We conducted projection diagrams with OPIRG's past and present member. Each took place separately from one another and took no more than twenty minutes to complete.

Out of twenty-four changes that have been made or are going to be made to the Food Cupboard, twelve changes were plotted differently between the three charts. This is very interesting because it shows how much variation there is between current OPIRG members and past members. This shows that they do not view the changes similarly in terms of how much resources/effort they will need versus the amount of impact they will

have. It was easy to see how two members saw things quite differently. Interestingly, OPIRG as an organization runs on consensus based decision-making and this is evidence that there is not consensus around the Food Cupboard and the chart that was created to implement change.

The main variation that was found between the charts completed by the members was that one member had more of a realistic perception on how many resources some things may take. The variations show how OPIRG and the Food Cupboard staff and volunteers need to reassess these changes. Where they want to focus their attention needs to be agreed on by all members even if there is a high amount of resources necessary to complete this change.

One change that was very similar on all three charts is 1H - which is to mandate anti-oppression training for all volunteers. All three charts agree that it would take a fairly high amount of resources (over halfway on the Y axis) and it would have a good impact on the Food Cupboard. This is a great example of an area of consensus. This is one of the core principles of OPIRG, which is constantly working towards a less oppressive world. Another point, which was plotted, very similarly was 1J – to communicate and implement community rules and reminders. According to the charts this would require a fair amount of resources but would have a great impact. Implementing rules and reminders for the Food Cupboard community would help reduce conflict between users/volunteers and the entire process would run more smoothly. When there is conflict, staff/volunteers would be able to deal with it right away. A further point of agreement was 1C, which is clear communication of projected numbers to volunteers in the basement prior to food distribution beginning. This would require

minimal resources while having a fair amount of impact. A task like this is something that is very easy to do and would make the distribution of food more equal and would help in terms of how much food to allot depending on how many people are using the Food Cupboard that day. Another point, which was agreed upon by all who completed the chart, was that improvements needed to be made to the physical capacity of the Food Cupboard. While this would require a high amount of resources, it would also have a great impact. Seeing all these similarities may point to the fact that these are things that can be addressed more easily since there is a consensus between everyone. One issue that came up for all of those who completed the chart was that it was sometimes difficult to plot some of the changes depending on how optimistically or pessimistically they were thinking about the future of the Food Cupboard.

Overall when looking at the charts, most of the changes were plotted in the quadrant that requires high amount of resources but would have a great impact. This is the nature of being a not-for-profit organization, which is providing a service to the community, which it is a part of. You can see each of the charts in the appendix (Chart A, Chart B, Chart C).

9.3 Observation

We conducted our observation on Wednesday January 22nd, 2014 in Sadleir House located at 751 George St N. The OPIRG coordinator told us previously that many people arrived an hour before the Cupboard opens in order to be the first few numbers and have the best access to food. We arrived in the waiting room at 2:20 p.m. and the Cupboard was scheduled to open at 3:00 p.m. Upon arrival, there was no one sitting at the sign in desk and we were left to assume the next steps of signing in ourselves. We were to state how many people were in our household, which was two. Having no one at

the sign-in desk could be discouraging for people who have never used the Cupboard before, have never been to Sadleir House and who are likely feeling overwhelmed walking into a waiting room full of people.

There were some cookies available for clients to have during the wait. There were approximately 25-30 people waiting by the time we had arrived. The people there were a wide variety of ages, ranging from newborn babies to elderly men and women. Not many of the people there seemed to be around the age of a student. There was diversity among the users. Many of the people seemed to know each other as they were interacting with one another in a joking manner and asking about other friends and family. An interesting observation was that everyone who was waiting had brought reusable bags to take their food home.

At 2:30 p.m. the student coordinator came into the waiting room and interacted with many of the clients who were already waiting. She offered clients the latest addition of the OPIRG newsletter and many clients took the newsletter and read it right away. The student coordinator had a great attitude with all the clients and often spent time with them discussing their family and friends as well.

According to the Food Cupboard Changes Chart, toys are supposed to be available in the waiting room for children to play with while they wait, however on the day we participated in the Cupboard they were not available. The Free Market is open at the same time as the Cupboard and some people went through it while waiting for the Cupboard to open.

At 3:25 p.m. more people were still arriving and people had not yet started going through the Food Cupboard even though it is scheduled to open at 3 p.m. At 3:40 p.m. the

first two numbers finally got called in. Although it was a very long wait for most people, overall there was a great positive energy in the waiting room. Once the numbers did start getting called people did become a bit more restless and things got more chaotic. The student coordinator was trying to move people as quickly as possible through the Cupboard and telling people when they were next in line.

We were number 30 in line for the Food Cupboard that day and finally got called in at 4:35 p.m. We were directed down the stairs and we gave one of our bags to the volunteer who was working in the Cupboard section that stores many of the non-perishable food items. We were allowed to choose from some fruit, vegetables and some non-perishable food items ourselves. The whole process of actually going through the Food Cupboard took no more than five minutes.

This is a list of the following items that we collected from the Food Cupboard that day: a frozen pizza, pancake mix, cappuccino mix, microwave popcorn, canned soup, an Aloe drink, Hamburger Helper, toothpaste, microwave dinners, bread buns, celery, onions, potatoes, brussel sprouts, beets, flour and frozen spinach.

This list exemplifies the normal food items that are usually available in many food banks and Cupboards across Canada: highly processed foods with low nutritional value. OPIRG has been working for many years trying to get more fresh fruits and vegetables in their Food Cupboard and this is evident in the small amount that was available that day.

Through observation we gained a better understanding of the daily functioning of the Food Cupboard. There is a lot happening during the hours that the Food Cupboard is open, so it is not surprising that there would be some level of disorganization. OPIRG

must come up with a way to manage this. There was no one sitting at the sign-in desk when we arrived and for someone who has never used the Food Cupboard this may discourage them from using the services. One of the recommendations on the Food Cupboard Changes Chart (see appendix) was to have toys available for the children to play with in the waiting room, but there were no toys available on the day we visited. These are two very simple things that do not require a high amount of resources that could have a large impact on the organization of the waiting room.

Our biggest finding was the sense of community that was felt within the waiting room, referring to, “the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common” (Oxford dictionary, 2014). It is difficult to quantify the sense of community in a space, but the waiting room and the Food Cupboard in general definitely had it. It was a warm welcoming space where everyone knew each other and seemed to be looking out for one another. The Food Cupboard was a place for them to come together and visit with one another. There were no feelings of being alienated or being stigmatized as a lesser member of society as the result of using these services. This was good to see since OPIRG is trying to accomplish this through their anti-oppression mandate within Food Cupboard.

In addition to observing how the Food Cupboard operates, we took part in picking up food from the KFS on January 31st, 2014. We arrived at KFS at 11 a.m. and notified workers in the warehouse that we were there to pick up food for the OPIRG Food Cupboard. We waited for a half an hour. We were then called into the warehouse where we filled the car with various food items. We drove back to Sadleir House where we were greeted by four to five Cupboard volunteers who carried the food items into the

Cupboard and started unpacking it. We made another trip back to KFS where we ran into the volunteer who normally picks up the food. While she was loading up her car we had to wait for ten minutes before we could load up our car. We then drove back to Saddleir House and unloaded all the food items with help from volunteers.

The observation of the operation of the Food Cupboard gave us first hand knowledge of the processes and dynamics involved. This insight allowed us to make more relevant recommendations since we could place ourselves more easily in the position of the users.

10 Recommendations

From our findings we have thought of the following recommendations that OPIRG could apply to the Food Cupboard as well as to the entire OPIRG office more broadly.

- **Review Food Cupboard Changes Chart**

Our number one recommendation is to review the Food Cupboard Changes Chart with the board, staff and, volunteers. During the interview process it was realized that this chart was done in a rushed manner and many of the points on it need to be further deliberated. It will be beneficial to revisit why particular changes were sought in the first place: to address the capacity crisis. It will be beneficial for the staff, board and volunteers to reflect on the Food Cupboard changes chart and re evaluate which changes are more important to them and which may not be as important.

- **Conduct a Projection Diagram with Board Members, Volunteers and Staff**

We recommend that OPIRG conduct a projection diagram similar to the one we conducted with their staff/ex staff members. We believe it would be helpful to carry something like this out with board members and volunteers to reestablish where their focus should be. A reflection exercise will give all members of OPIRG a chance to review the last year and analyze how it went. They can consider which initiatives have been successful and which have not, and why. Since it has been almost a year since the Food Cupboard review, it is now a great time to do an exercise similar to the one we carried out and begin to brainstorm about the Food Cupboard Changes Chart.

- **Reserve Time for Food Cupboard Bi-Monthly or Monthly**

It was expressed in one of our interviews that the Food Cupboard was a main focus

for OPIRG, Peterborough. However, we found that the only time that the Food Cupboard receives full attention is during the summer months, when OPIRG is less busy. We recommend that OPIRG set aside specific time monthly or bi-monthly to focus directly on the Food Cupboard and how it may be improved. During this time they can also reflect on what has been running smoothly and what has not. This will allow the organization to address problems more promptly in order to avoid further issues.

- **Scale Down Range of Issues**

In addition, it may be time for OPIRG to scale down the amount of issues they want to tackle and define their priorities. If the Food Cupboard is really a primary focus for OPIRG, perhaps it is time to reconsider some of the programs and activities that OPIRG runs. It is difficult to take on numerous social justice issues while simultaneously running a busy Food Cupboard. To do this in a satisfactory way impeccable time management is needed. We believe OPIRG could run their Food Cupboard more smoothly if there were fewer programs that need a lot of attention. This would obviously be a major change to consider and would require a lot of thought in terms of the direction OPIRG takes in the future.

- **Install “To Do List”**

Another recommendation is to install a checklist of things to be done before, during, and after the Food Cupboard is open. The tasks could be assigned to a certain staff member or volunteer as their responsibility. A list could include things such as bringing toys into the waiting room, distributing the OPIRG newsletter to clients waiting, communicating with the volunteers working in the basement on how many people will be using the Cupboard that day and ensuring that there is always a volunteer in the waiting

room to welcome and assist new clients. This is a very simple task that can be done by both volunteers and staff to make the whole process run more smoothly.

- **Consistency**

We recommend that OPIRG consistently implement all of the changes they deem important after reflecting on the Food Cupboard Changes Chart. Consistency is an issue within the organization and this would benefit the overall functioning of the Food Cupboard.

Another issue that OPIRG and the Food Cupboard face is consistency with volunteers. Many of the changes have not been implemented as a result of volunteers not being consistently available. This is a difficult issue to take on as there is only so much that can be asked of volunteers. One way to handle this issue may be to have the volunteers sign a contract agreeing to the amount of time they will be available in a month and ask them to adhere to a schedule.

11. Conclusion

This report has looked at the Food Cupboard run by OPIRG. It outlines the role of Food Banks and talks about their struggles. OPIRG runs a Food Cupboard, which attempts to be anti-oppressive, not requesting any information from their clients. Peterborough has a growing unemployment rate and is in need of programs similar to the Food Cupboard. Therefore, OPIRG is providing a necessary service to the Peterborough community.

OPIRG is doing a great job as a small social justice organization in providing the much-needed food to the local population. However, in terms of the changes they were hoping to implement through the Food Cupboard Changes exercises only 25% have been

implemented. Another issue with the changes is that even the 25% that have been implemented are not being implemented consistently. The Food Cupboard has all the best intentions but needs to aim for greater efficiency and consistency in order for the Cupboard to run at its full capacity. In conclusion, we believe it is clear that OPIRG needs to revisit the Food Cupboard Changes Chart, and to reevaluate each of the changes considering which of the changes will have the most impact. These changes need to be consistently implemented.

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13. Appendix

13.1 Food Cupboard Changes Chart

Food Cupboard Changes		
Immediate (1)	Medium-Term (2)	Long-Term (3)
A) Standardized food delivery time to no more than 2 hours prior to program start ✓	A) Explore other food delivery options ×	A) Continue to monitor the hours the food cupboard is open (child friendly?) ×
B) Create children's station in waiting room ✓	B) Develop conflict resolution policy ◆	B) Develop capacity for fresh food donation/growing system × - Grow a Row
C) Clear communication of projected numbers to volunteers in basement prior to food distribution beginning ✓	C) Establish a standardized progressive discipline procedure ◆	C) Make refreshments available in waiting room ×
D) Make an Open/Close sign for the Free Market which will be hung on the banister ✓	D) Create communication board for within waiting room ✓	D) Develop workshops and other programming ×
E) Create a standardized incident record and complaint procedure ◆	E) Update Volunteer Agreement ×	E) Make improvements to the physical capacity of the Food Cupboard × (fridge and freezer space)
F) Develop educational posters/pamphlets ×	F) Form a food Centre Steering Collective ×	F) Establish a Food Centre AGM ×
G) Develop Food Centre newsletter ✓	G) Continue to develop a partnership with Nourish Peterborough to move towards a Peterborough Food Centre network ×	
H) Mandate anti-oppression training for all volunteers ×		
I) Determine the new name for the Food Centre with the community ×		
J) Communicate and implement Community Rules and Reminders ×		
K) Continue to develop operation procedures ◆		

Legend:

✓- has been implemented

◆- in process of implementation

×- has not been implemented

Chart A

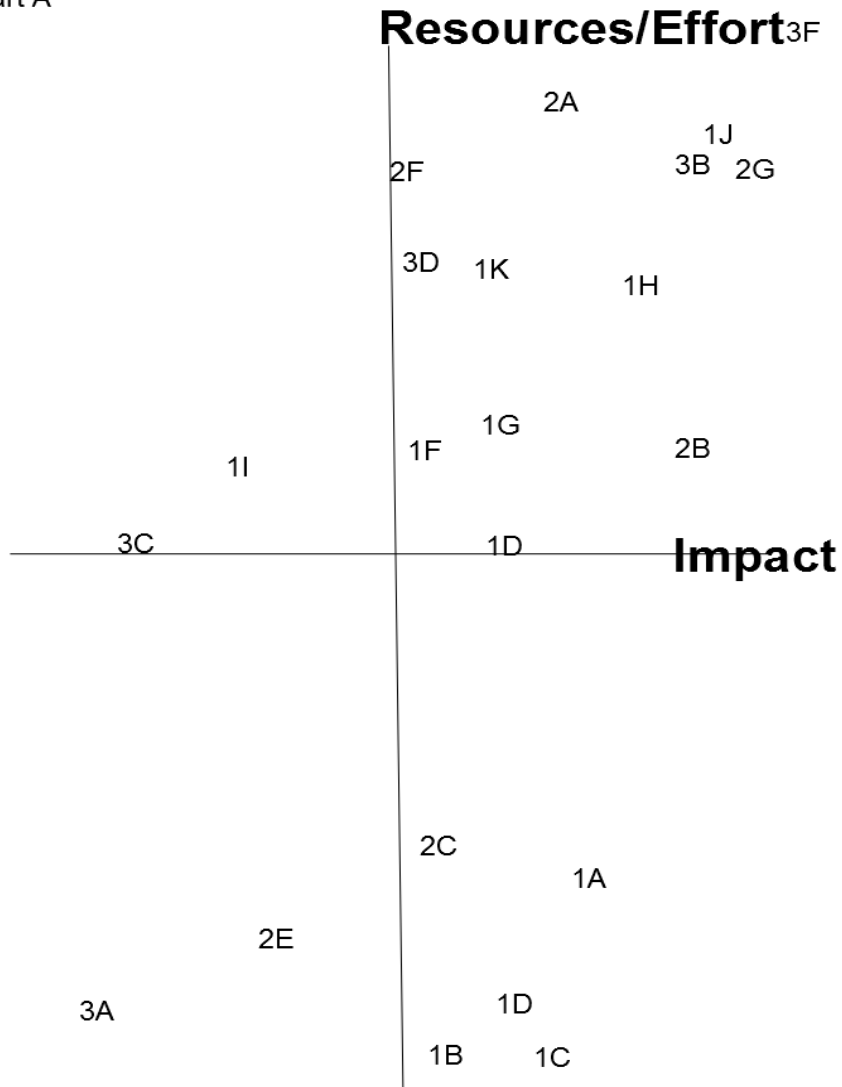


Chart B

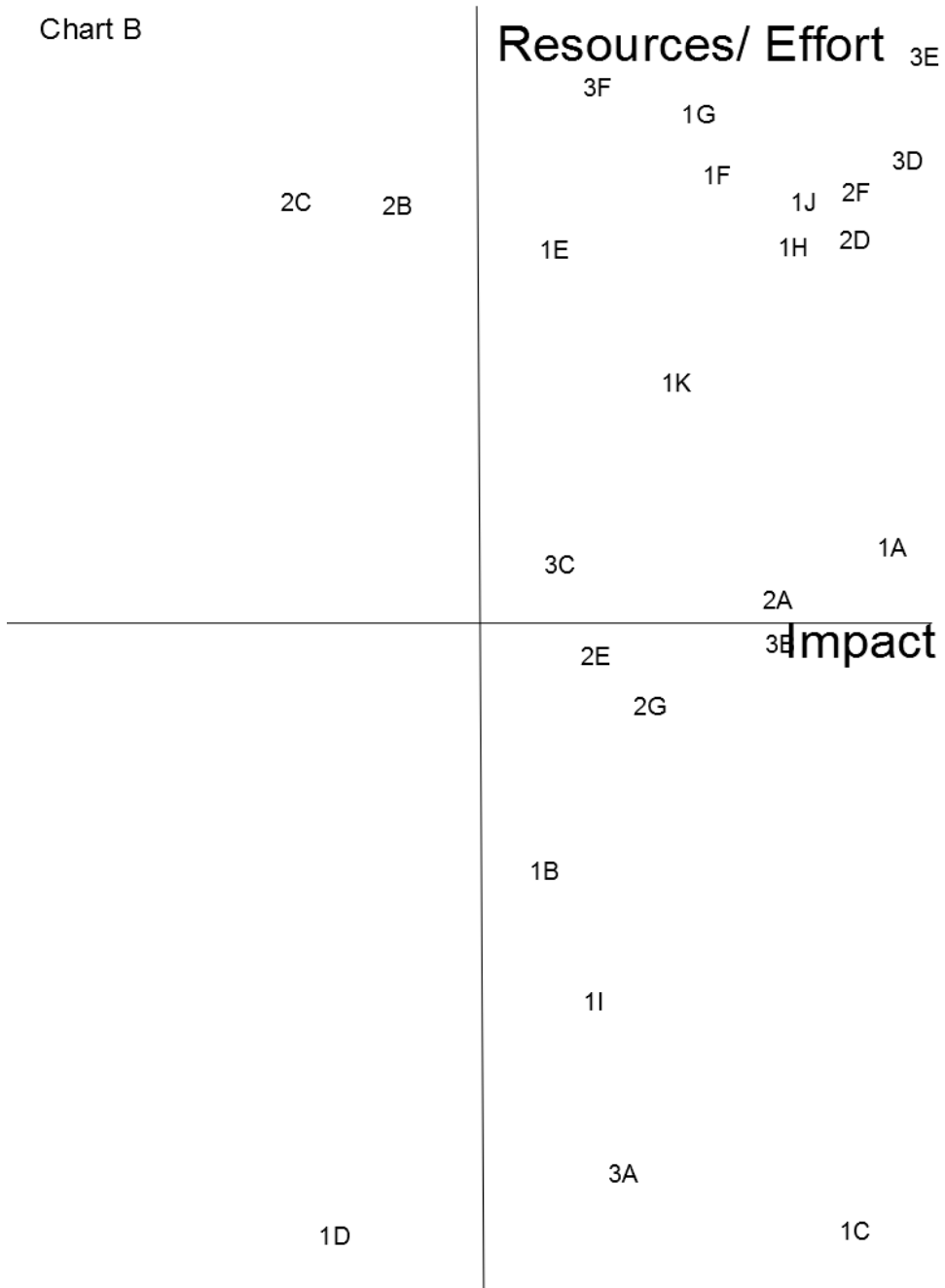
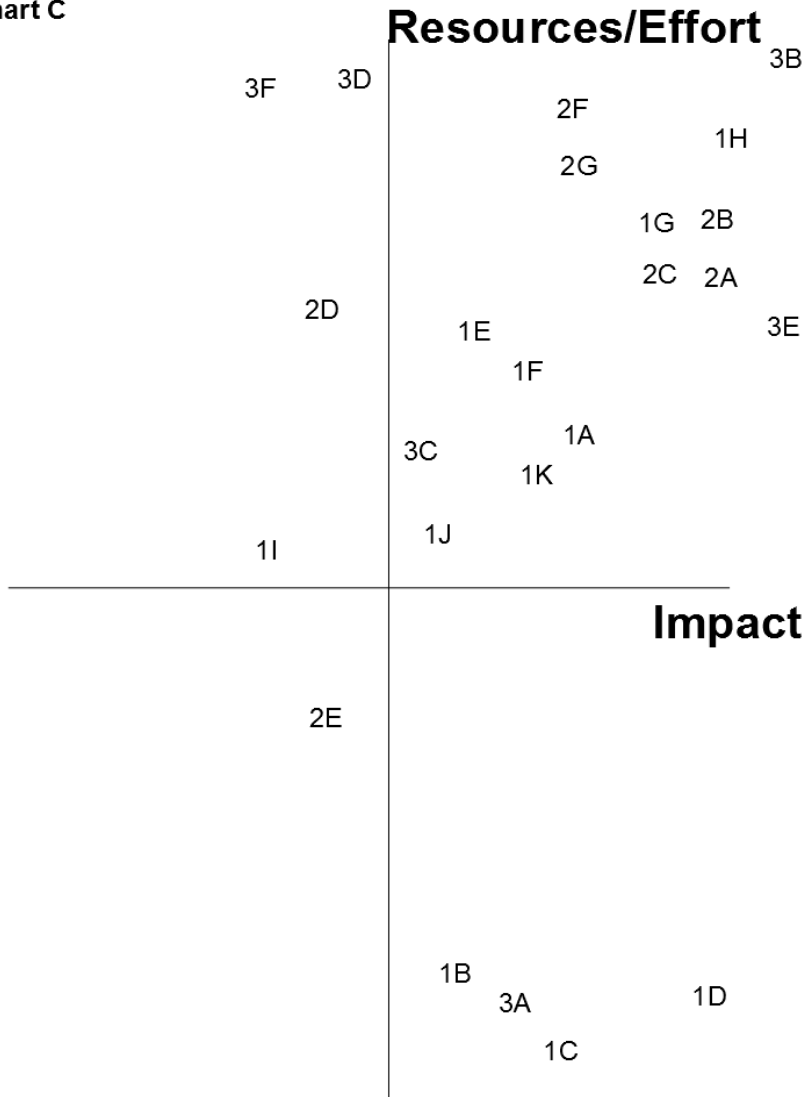


Chart C



13.2 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

For OPIRG coordinator

- 1) As the coordinator of OPIRG, where does the Food Cupboard lie in terms of responsibilities for you?
- 2) In reference to the Food Cupboard Changes chart that was created in August of 2013, where did this chart come from? What was the process in creating it?
 - a) What does immediate, medium and long term really mean?
- 3) Do you think the overall changes have been effective in making the Food Cupboard more sustainable, efficient and, effective?
 - a) What positive changes have you seen with the Food Cupboard since your time with OPIRG
 - b) If you had all the resources available to you, what change on the Food Cupboard changes chart would you do first?

For Food Cupboard student coordinator

- 1) What are your responsibilities within the Food Cupboard?
 - a) How long have you held the position of student coordinator?
- 1) Where did you learn about your role/responsibilities?
- 2) How do you think you could be more effective in the Food Cupboard?
- 3) What was your role in the Food Cupboard Changes Chart?
 - a) How did the chart come together, what lead up to it?
 - b) Define the time scale in the chart
- 4) Do you think overall, the changes have been effective?
 - a) What positive changes have you seen in your time here?
 - b) If you had all the resources available to you, what changes on the Food Cupboard Changes Chart would you complete first?