



## Showing up and making magic at Food Security Summit 2

There was something special in the air the evening of May 4 when over 50 people showed up at Memorial Hall for the Selkirk & District Community Foundation hosted Food Security Summit 2 – Building Momentum, and when it was all over, those who were there knew it.

“These kinds of conversations lead to some magic stuff, they really do,” said Heather Fontaine, a speaker and participant at the summit and Community Connector at Ruth Hooker School.

“Tonight, at the table, it’s like there’s all these great resources. And it’s ‘wow, we can call these people and get some great support for our families really quickly’. These kinds of events are crucial.”

The summit followed up on a first one held in March where, in a World Café style, attendees worked in small groups brainstorming ways agencies involved in food security can work together more efficiently.

David Thorne, SDCF board member, said the original meeting had dynamic results.

“The momentum we had after the first one we could have built a skyscraper,” Thorne said.

The second summit attracted a larger, more diverse crowd and included three guest speakers –Fontaine, Tristan Dreilich, Network Coordinator with the Manitoba Harm Reduction Network in Selkirk, and Meaghan Erbus, VP Advocacy & Stakeholder Relations with Manitoba Harvest.

The Foundation’s Vital Signs 2026 report showed that 29% of people in Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements worry food will run out before they have money to buy more and 33% struggle to eat balanced meals. The report also revealed that in 2022 visits to the Selkirk Food Bank hit 9,672 and it’s continued to rise.

“Through our Vital Signs report we know that more and more people in our region can’t afford nutritious food. We also know that there’s many people in our community filling the gaps,” Thorne said.

“Did you know we have at least four regional hamper programs in our area? We have food pantries in several schools and of course the Soup Kitchen and the Food Bank.”

The summits aim to connect these groups to support creating ways they can work together to improve the system and make it more efficient.

Erbus said the evening was uplifting.

“It was wonderful. It was so good to see all these folks in the room together, wanting to make change, and meet and find new ways to do things differently or better,” she said.

“There was so much energy and mutual support and respect. You could see that in the room.”

Harvest Manitoba is available to any of the groups working to ensure people have access to food in the region and she dispelled the myth that Harvest is a Winnipeg-only organization.

“We used to be called Winnipeg Harvest, and it’s funny because we actually only serviced Winnipeg for a very short amount of time, and we quickly started sharing food across the province,” Erbus said.

“Knowing that, that the reach isn’t just inside the Perimeter, I think it’s important for community-based organizations or food serving agencies that want to get involved with Harvest Manitoba to know that there isn’t a specific boundary for that either. We want to know what you’re doing, you don’t have to access our services for food, but we can share best practices and get together.”

The fact that the room was full of dozens of people wanting to improve existing systems was encouraging for Dreilich.

“I feel like we hit on a few good ideas. It was encouraging to see over 50 people who are dedicated to solving food security issues in Selkirk. Even just that group of folks in the same room is pretty inspiring,” he said.

“I think for me it was visible that there’s partnerships to be had there, there’s no lack of willingness, and there’s opportunities. There’s enough food to go around, it’s a question of ‘how do we get organized enough to make it happen’, and what strings do we need to pull and who do we need to bug to make this a thing. For me, it’s always a question of how do we centre the people that are either in the centre of that service or are the ones that are reaching out for that service. We need to let them lead and then the rest of us need to figure out the gaps on our end.”

Fontaine said when she started working with food security she was impressed by the programs already in place in the community and attending the summit opened her eyes even more.

“I know when I took on this role at the school I was so blown away by how much was already going on in the community and how little I had actually known about it,” she said.

“This is such a great opportunity to realize (all that’s going on). There’s something going on at Knox Church, I had no idea, that’s an amazing resource we can share with our families. And it’s probably an easier way for them to access food quickly. These kinds of events are so crucial for that. You start to realize, ‘oh, you guys are already doing that’, ok, we can eliminate some barriers if we collaborate and work together on those things.”

A sign-up sheet at the back of the hall gave attendees the opportunity to continue discussions and carry the work done so far into action. The Foundation will be supporting the community to build the solutions going forward by connecting community partners and making impactful grants to projects that enable solutions.

“There are so many strong leaders stepping up to the plate,” said Meredith Boerchers, the Foundation’s Executive Director.

“The Foundation strives to make our community – the City of Selkirk, the RM of St Andrews and RM of St Clements – a vital place to live, work and play, for all. Connecting and nurturing partnerships is critical to the betterment of the community as a whole, and it’s inspiring to see it happen in real time at network events like this.”

For Thorne, handing the reins over to the community after the second summit felt good.

“I’m always thrilled to see the passion in the room but the passion doesn’t just magically show up, the passion is from the commitment of every single person in this room,” he said.

“We don’t do the same jobs, we don’t have the same challenges, but we have the same love. Love for our community, love for our fellow person. From me to you, you folks are the heavy lifters, we’re just facilitating this. Each and every day you’re putting your hand up to answer the call, you should be proud, each and every one of you here today.”

A book listing all those working to provide food security in the region is also being compiled so people can use it as a resource and connect.