

Annual Report - Review of 2021

The People's Potato

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Who Are We?

The People's Potato is a worker-run collective soup kitchen that, before the pandemic, served healthy, by-donation vegan lunches, every regular school day of the Fall and Winter semester, from 12:30PM - 2PM, on the 7th floor of the Hall building. The project began in 1999 as an initiative to address student poverty and the lack of healthy food options at Concordia University. Today, the Potato is a fee-levy group, funded by Concordia students. During the Winter and Summer 2021 semesters, we served approximately 225 people every two weeks with our emergency food basket delivery and pick-up program. During the Fall 2021 semester, we served a 3 course vegan meal to approximately 250-300 people three days a week and we offered emergency food baskets to approximately 100 people every two weeks. Apart from food service and security, the Potato is committed to the broader struggles of anti-poverty, anti-oppression, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Some History

In 1999, a group of Concordia students and activists, with a passion for healthy food and a concern for anti-poverty politics, came together to start what has since become a successful student/community based project. Their goal was to provide an alternative to the corporate-run eating spaces on campus. Since its inception, the Potato kitchen has grown from a small volunteer-run collective to a worker's collective, currently employing ten people and collaborating with a strong volunteer base.

Over the years, the Potato has struggled with issues concerning funding and space. One of the first challenges faced by the Potato involved the Sodexo/Marriot (now Chartwells) cafeteria service. The Potato had to gain its kitchen space through bitter negotiations with the Concordia administration, carving out the location for the kitchen from the abundant corporate space provided to Sodexo. In short time, along with the space, the Potato also took many of Sodexo's customers.

The People's Potato has certainly made a good name for itself over the years and has become an important part of the Concordia community. After years of negotiating with the university, and with the help of the CSU, the People's Potato secured newly renovated locations for their kitchen and office spaces. This was necessary due to the university's huge renovation projects, which are ongoing. As a result of these negotiations, the People's Potato was moved to a brand new kitchen right in the middle of the 7th floor of the Hall Building in the summer of 2019.

When COVID-19 was announced as a worldwide Pandemic, collective workers briefly lost access to the kitchen but continued to support the community through supporting other food security organizations. After regaining access to the kitchen, collective workers created a delivery and pick-up emergency food basket program while the university was mostly closed to students and classes were virtual. When the university shifted to a hybrid of in-person and virtual classes, the in-person vegan meal service was once again offered by the Potato.

Year End Accomplishments for 2021

- Created additional programming during the Summer 2021 semester to be able to serve everyone on the waitlist for emergency food baskets during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Reopened our kitchen to offer by-donation vegan meals 3 days a week
- Implemented additional protocols for food preparation and distribution to address the health and safety needs of COVID-19
- Reopened our kitchen to volunteers and created a more regular volunteer orientation schedule for training in kitchen health and safety
- Supported the Concordia community, and the community at large, during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Purchased a new van!

Year End Goals for 2022

- Continuing to support the Concordia community and the community at large during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increasing the number of solidarity servings we can provide for other food security groups and community organizations that share our mandate
- Strengthening and expanding our volunteer community
- Finding more ways to translate our values as an organization into our practices
- Strengthening our internal policy
- Campaigning to promote our services to serve daily vegan meals to more students

Working during the Pandemic

At the start of 2021, we continued our delivery and pick-up emergency food basket service due to the university being largely closed to students and classes being online. The collective was divided into two bubbles so that if any one member of the collective had to self-isolate due to COVID-19, we could continue our services in some capacity.

During the summer, we began negotiating and working with the university and the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) department to be able to accept volunteers back in the garden and to serve daily vegan meals in the safest way possible during COVID-19. Adjustments were then made to our kitchen so that in the fall of 2021 we were able to return to making daily vegan meals 3 days a week and reopen our kitchen to volunteers. We also returned to our normal emergency food basket program of offering food baskets in-person on a first come first serve basis.

Food Bank

Since Concordia was still mostly closed to students in January 2021, we continued our emergency food basket program through deliveries and in-person pick-ups at the Frigo Vert during the Winter 2021 semester. We received much guidance from the wonderful people over at Midnight Kitchen who helped us in creating a model for our food bank at the start of the pandemic. We also collaborated with them through helping each other with food basket deliveries during lock-down which made it possible to serve as many people as we can. It has been inspiring to see how hard they work and how much love and commitment they put into what they do. It has kept us motivated to keep going through difficult times.

To run our new food bank delivery system, we had to build and maintain a database for the people who received our food baskets, and we began using different applications to create delivery routes and to organize pick-up appointments. We expanded the number and types of items in the food baskets, notably more types of produce in the vegetable bags. We managed to serve over just over 200 people, 80-85 of which we delivered to every other week!

For the first time in the history of the Potato, we were able to offer our emergency food basket program during the summer! This was because we were understaffed in the Winter 2021 semester, so there was enough funding for more collective members to work over the summer. The program operated solely as a pick-up service out of the terrace of the Hive café in the mezzanine of the Hall Building and helped us to get to everyone on our waiting list.

At the start of the fall semester we had to pause our emergency food basket program while we focused on our daily lunch service. At the beginning of November, we managed to restart the program with the help of our newly hired collective members and the return of our volunteers.

This program operated on a bi-weekly basis out of our kitchen on the seventh floor of the Hall building where we served around 100 people on a first come first serve basis.

FLAC and Online Opt-outs

Fee-Levy Advocacy at Concordia (FLAC) is the association of non-academic student organizations and initiatives at Concordia University that are student-elected through the referendum process.

2021 saw the successful continuation of our independently run Fee-Levy Opt out service, which started in 2020, and is managed primarily through the hard work of Abdulla at the Refugee Center. Since launching this system, we have noticed that we have virtually no complaints in regards to students being refunded their contributions. We are also able to clearly show what services students are choosing to opt-out from, which we believe, in the long-run, will give students the information they need about the positive effects of these student / campus groups. We already saw this trend taking place with the form having a **63%** completion rate, meaning approx **2 out of the 3** who started the form finished it, and the rest dropped off mostly around the page where it shows them how much they are actually charged. Once they saw for themselves that fee-levy groups are not actually responsible for a large portion of their fees, they would sometimes choose to stay opted in.

Fee-levy groups have definitely seen an increase in the amount of money we are having to reimburse to students, because of the online system, but if we compare it to other universities where online opt-outs happened, we are way under the margin. As Abdulla reported, “This is about **3%- 4%** of the Student population, which is still better than our online counterparts at McGill and Queens, which is **10%-12%**.”

Winter 2021= 3-4% opt-out rate

Fall 2021= 3% opt out rate

More from the report:

Over **4100** different people visited the form meaning almost **1 out 3** people who visited the form opted out.

Over **85%** of the Opt outs came in the first **12 hours and the last 6 hours** the form was available, and the overwhelming majority of the first 12 hour opt outs were the same ones from the Fall, meaning people were well aware and were waiting for the date.

Future goals for The Potato in regards to FLAC? More awareness and outreach campaigns to make sure Concordia students and faculty know the importance of fee-levy groups, and how the amount of money actually being put towards them (maximum 7\$/semester), is quite low, if you factor in the positive impact they have on the students and campus life, overall.

Kitchen

During the first semester of 2021, Kitchen portfolio was tasked with ordering fresh produce from J&G Fruits & Légumes, bulk beans, lentils and grains from AGT Clic, and receiving donations from Moisson Montreal to redistribute and support our food basket delivery and pick up program. We also cooked for solidarity servings to partnering organizations like Le Frigo Vert, Meals for Milton park, and Resilience Montreal. In addition, the Kitchen portfolio took care of donating and rotating our back stock of dry goods that were leftover from 2020 when the pandemic hit.

For the fall 2021 semester, we resumed our lunch program service for the very first time since March 2020. We implemented a contactless system using trays to transport users' containers, for this we bought approximately 80 cafeteria trays. In addition, we resumed our knife sharpening using Bertoldi's services and started ordering spices from Épices Anatol. We purchased new cutting boards for the kitchen and are in the process of donating our old ones. We also expanded our solidarity servings, providing meals for Divest Concordia and Divest McGill, on top of that we continue to provide food to Le Frigo Vert's PWYC café and Milton Park.

In 2022 The Kitchen Portfolio plans on replacing or fixing our ovens. This was a goal we had had for 2021 but due to logistical problems we were unable to get it done. Furthermore we plan on solidifying some form of regular space sharing collaboration with the Otsenhákta Student Center, something we began working on in the 2021 Fall semester, but due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 it was delayed.

Volunteer Coordination

The Potato is able to fulfill its mandate because of the countless hours dedicated by our many volunteers and stagiaires. Volunteers are encouraged to sign up for shifts using a platform called SLOTTR, which is also a fairly new initiative at the Potato, influenced by our use of this same platform for our foodbank pick up service that we were mainly operating at the beginning of the pandemic. We find it helps us to know who is coming in and when. Volunteers arrive between 9AM-3PM on service days, to help with our daily preparation of meals. This can be

food preparation, serving, and cleaning up. Additionally, volunteers help with our emergency food basket service and help with our garden in the summer. We continue to receive student interns (stagiaires) from schools, such as John Grant and Summit.

At the start of 2021, we unfortunately were not able to accept volunteers due to COVID-19 and Concordia's restricted in-person access. However, when the campus reopened in late August 2021, we were able to welcome volunteers back into the kitchen again!

Another big change was that we decided to shift from holding volunteer orientations only once a semester, to having regular orientations, which we initially offered 1-2 times a week, and later on, on a bi-weekly basis. Orientations are now a required part of the process of becoming a volunteer at the Potato and we have found that this has helped keep the flow in the kitchen smooth and efficient and has helped with making the kitchen a safer space.

In December 2021, we were able to have our first volunteer appreciation celebration in 2 years, where we got the chance to give back to our volunteers for all their hard work and dedication. Throughout the Fall 2021 semester, we built up a solid base of volunteers, some old, a lot of new, and we hope to continue expanding a strong base of motivated volunteers in 2022.

Education

The Education portfolio is committed to offering free and accessible workshops to the community, where people can learn about making food and food politics in a safe and fun environment. These workshops also represent a great opportunity to have volunteers and/or community members share their skills. We usually aim to offer around three workshops per semester. Unfortunately, in 2021, due to circumstances related to being understaffed, and the regulations caused by the pandemic, we were unable to host workshops.

When we began doing our food basket delivery and pick-up program we started adding special treats to the baskets to help spread a little cheer and to offer additional ideas for how to prepare the food we provided. Within the treats we added instructions on how to prepare the food. Some of these treats included: spice mixes for soups and stews, and quick baking mixes for mug cakes and pancakes.

For 2022 we plan to start up our workshops once again and in addition have our own workers be able to access more training. With the intention of expanding our knowledge around food and food insecurity and being able to pass on our knowledge to others.

Garden

The People's Potato garden, located on Loyola campus, is a community space whose aim is to grow and distribute herbs and vegetables to the community, while also providing an educational space where people can learn how to garden. As COVID restrictions loosened, we were slowly able to welcome volunteers to our garden while maintaining safety protocols & keeping a contact list for emergency contact-tracing.

Fall semester 2021 was the first in many years where garden shifts were maintained regularly from the summer until the end of October. We welcomed stagiaires from Summit high school every Friday, who would help us harvest produce that we donated to Head and Hands, an NDG-based nonprofit focusing on Montreal youth under 25. With Summit's help, we were able to donate over 250 lbs of kale, swiss chard, mizuna, tomatillos, tomatoes, green beans, radishes, eggplants, carrots, chiles, and bell peppers. We were able to close the garden down at the end of October with the help of Summit stagiaires, People's Potato volunteers, and staff. We planted over 200 cloves of garlic, which we look forward to harvesting and using in Fall semester 2022.

Board of Directors

In 2021, the board adjusted to the shifts in service, alongside the People's Potato. As we went from campus being closed and the Potato doing delivery services, to returning to providing lunches to students three days a week in the Fall 2021 semester.

In order to aid the Potato, the board invested its budget in purchasing reusable containers for students who did not bring them during the lunch services.

The board also supported the collective in 2021 by providing them with a new laptop to facilitate online meetings, and other work. The board also chose to donate \$2000 to SEFF (Student Emergency and Food fund) in December 2021.

The board is currently working on two separate projects, one of these projects is the creation of new T-Shirts for People Potato. The other project is that the board has invested a portion of its 2021 budget in the creation of a new website for the People's Potato. The new website should be released sometime in the Fall of 2022. What will be special about this website will not only be the updated visuals and the improved functionality, but also that there will be a new focus on highlighting volunteers, both past and present, and their experiences.

The People Potato board will aim to continue aiding the collective members in whatever capacity possible.

Finances

The finance committee focuses on organizing the bookkeeping and other financial aspects of the People's Potato. The committee works in conjunction with the collective to:

- Create yearly budgets and coordinate all financial transactions
- Ensure expenditures are properly documented
- Keep track of all spending and revenue
- Prepare updates to present to the collective and the board of directors
- Prepare projections related to wages and salaries, revenue, and spending
- Work with a professional bookkeeper and accounting firm to gather all necessary data for quarterly reports and end-of-year reports and statements
- Ensure books are balanced on a monthly basis
- Ensure that spending remains on target with semesterly and yearly goals

Since Concordia's fiscal year ends in April, while the Potato's ends in December, our "end-of-year" revenue will not always line up with the University's. Some years, the discrepancy results in a surplus, and others in a deficit.

For 2021 our increase in revenues were lower than usual, due to a higher number of fee-levy opt outs. (An increase of \$4,891 for 2021 which was significantly lower than last year's \$15,441). However, due to less overhead because of reduced staff (6-7 employees, instead of 10) and a reduction in services due to the pandemic, we still ended up with an overall surplus of \$107,583 for our total budget.

Similarly to last year's Annual report, our budget lines shifted away from cooking related kitchen expenses, with a large amount being spent on our new food basket delivery program. On account of this, our budget lines shifted from cooking related expenses, to coordinating and delivering drystock and produce bags.

At the beginning of the fall 2021 semester, students returned to campus, and we were finally able to start cooking 3 times a week. During this time, our budget lines started to fall back in place. However, owing to the decrease in days of service from 5 to 3, and lowered staff, we once again underspent on most of our major lines.

One of our biggest purchases this year was our new van!!! We finally said goodbye to our old rust bucket and made a serious upgrade. Our new van, a 2019 Ford Transit, cost us \$46,973. It

has a lot of safety features and also is more fuel efficient. The money that was used for the van was from a fund that we had set up a few years ago, from money we received from the University, when it was noticed that our GSA fee-levy contributions had not been paid out in 10 years.

With the purchase of our new van, and the money saved from payroll, our total assets stand at \$690,899, compared to last year's \$647,000, which translates to an increase of \$43,899.

For 2022 our goal is to reduce our accounting and banking fees and find more ways to streamline our finance practices. This would allow us to spend more energy increasing our food services to help abate inflation and the ongoing hardships of the pandemic.

In Memory of Coco

We'd like to take a moment to remember and honor our coworker Coco who passed away on June 14, 2021.

Coco had undergone a major surgery in the summer of 2020 and after months of rehabilitation, her last days were spent in Italy, where she was closer to her family.

Coco was very passionate about issues of social justice not only at work but in her community and personal life. She was very active in many operations, notably Solidarity Across Borders where she organized anti-detention initiatives and helped with food security. She joined our collective back in August 2019 and brought with her so much energy and so many ideas. Coco was a force within our collective. She was kind, critical, and was truly an inspiring leader to be around. We miss her very much and hope that she is at peace.