

The People's Potato

Annual Report 2022

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Who are We?

The People's Potato is a worker-run collective soup kitchen that serves healthy, by-donation vegan lunches to Concordia students and the community at large, Monday through Thursday during the Fall and Winter semester, from 12:30PM - 2PM, on the 7th floor of the Hall building.

During the Fall and Winter semester, the People's Potato hosts food-related workshops on a monthly basis, as well as providing an emergency food basket pickup every two weeks. During the Summer semester, the People's Potato coordinates an organic garden plot that provides vegetables to its volunteers and to other food security organizations.

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. In addition to 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.

Over the years, the People's Potato has become an important part of the Concordia community. After years of negotiation with Concordia administration, supported by the CSU, the People's Potato secured newly renovated locations for their kitchen and office spaces. This was necessary due to the university's building-wide 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 the COVID-19 pandemic was announced, collective workers briefly lost access to the kitchen but continued to support the community through supporting other food security organizations such as Midnight Kitchen and Innovation Jeunes. After regaining access to the kitchen in the Fall of 2020, collective workers created a delivery service for the emergency food basket program while the university was mostly closed to students and classes were virtual, eventually switching to in-person distribution as more students were allowed on campus. When the university shifted to a hybrid distribution of in-person and virtual classes in Fall of 2021, the in-person vegan meal service was once again offered by the Potato, beginning with 3 days of lunch service. In 2022, we increased our in-person meal service to 4 days of lunch service.

Year End Accomplishments for 2022

- Returning to 4 days of service
- Instituting monthly Collective Development Days to improve internal organizational structure
- Returning to a full collective of 10 members
- Hosting our first in-person workshop since the pandemic began

Year Ends Goals for 2023

- Replacing our stovetop with a new electric model
- Returning to 5 days of service
- Opening up our kitchen for lending to other grassroots organizations
- Strengthening our internal structures to prevent burnout amongst collective members
- Increasing the number of regular volunteers
- Continuing our Collective Development Days and developing internal structures to better support collective members
- Acquiring outside funding to increase our food bank services
- Increase garden productivity for use in our daily food service

Kitchen

This was the first full year of service since 2020, and the Kitchen Portfolio was tasked with ordering produce and dry goods, and maintaining our kitchen space. We also

routinely received donations from Moisson Montreal to support our daily service as well as to be redistributed through our bi-monthly food basket giveaways.

During the Fall semester, we altered our COVID policies and procedures so we could accommodate more students. The amount of people we were able to serve daily doubled from 250 to 500 as a result of this change. We began the year serving 3 days a week, and we are now serving 4 days a week. We are expecting to return to our pre-COVID standard of 5 days a week in 2023. We also returned to allowing volunteers to eat in our kitchen space to facilitate growth of relations with our volunteers and to encourage volunteers to return consistently.

We took on more solidarity servings with other organizations around Montreal including Frigo Vert, Divest McGill, Eccologi, Resilience, Prenons la Ville, the Atwater Community Pantry, and others. We lent our kitchen space out to the Otsenhákta Student Centre to prepare their summer feast for Indigenous students at Concordia. This was our first time lending our kitchen space to an outside group since moving into our new space. At the end of the year we were approached by organizations who were organizing a strike against COP15 and in lieu of our daily lunch service we served on-site at the demonstration.

We facilitated three special servings during 2022: a Ghanaian Cookup, Vegan Pulled Pork Burgers, and chili with cornbread.

We also had major repairs done to our oven. We previously only had one functional convection oven and we have returned to having access to both.

Food Bank

After changing to a delivery-system during the lockdown year of the pandemic, the People's Potato Emergency Food Basket Program has gradually returned to its normal function as an in-person system at full capacity in the past year. We expanded the number of baskets from 80 in 2021 to 110 in 2022 on a bi-weekly basis throughout the winter and fall semesters. In the preparation of these baskets, we tried to increase the variety of products we are offering to include menstrual products, hygiene products, and baby food, whenever possible.

However, returning to full capacity came with its own challenges. The impact of the increasing food prices was clearly noticed in our emergency food baskets program. There was a consistent increase in the number of people in need of our program throughout 2022. Unfortunately, we were unable to provide enough food baskets to

meet the demands of our service users. The People's Potato Food Bank service was limited in the amount of food it could receive to redistribute from Moisson Montreal due to supply chain issues, as well as lacking the volunteer support needed to produce more baskets. In order to attempt to meet the increasing public needs, the People's Potato will need to acquire more funding and more volunteer support.

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 an excellent opportunity for volunteers and/or community members to share their skills. The People's Potato aims to offer around two workshops per semester.

The pandemic put a halt to in-person workshop offerings, but we were able to host our first in-person workshop since the pandemic this year in the Fall semester! We worked with Dro Cardoso from the Hive Café to host a workshop on making vegan and gluten-free Pão de Queijo, a Brazilian cheese bread. We had 11 participants who left the workshop with delicious cheese bread.

Going forward, we are excited to continue offering more in-person workshops and are looking forward to expanding our engagement with the People's Potato community through educational opportunities.

The Education portfolio also coordinates participating in internal workshops and training for our collective members. In 2022, we participated in Amanda Lickers' Indigenous Allyship Best Practices workshop. This workshop helped us to learn best practices for engaging in Indigenous solidarity initiatives and address how settler engagement in anticolonial/decolonial social movements must be rooted in a larger systemic analysis. It encouraged personal reflection, critical thinking, humility, and willingness to incorporate relevant feedback as central to meaningful relationship building for consent and accountability. We hope to continue to carry these lessons through our future work and relations with Indigenous peoples.

Board

In 2022, the Board adjusted to the shifts in service alongside the People's Potato Worker Collective. We had our first full year of providing lunches to students, starting with three days a week and increasing our service to four days a week in Winter semester 2022.

Physically, the Board stepped in throughout 2022 to support us as we struggled with inconsistent volunteer numbers. Kylan and Donald helped us pick up literal tons of food donations at Moisson Montréal. Tate, Nadine, Kylan, Donald, Hanine, and Raquel would help us serve at lunchtime. Nadine and Hanine promoted our organization to potential volunteers at the Dean of Students' Virtual Clubs Fair as well as in-person at the LIVE Centre Volunteer Fair. Nadine & Tate began work on improving our website and social media's functionality. Even during the summer, Hanine was a regular volunteer at the People's Potato Garden on Loyola campus!

Developmentally, the Board also supported the collective in 2022 by participating in Human Systems Intervention interviews, Hanine taking minutes during one of our Collective Development Days, and by attending the Best Practices for Indigenous Solidarity workshop presented by Amanda Lickers.

Administratively, the Board provided support throughout 2022. Kylan helped us interview and employ one of our newest collective members, Ray. Gaby also helped the Potato renegotiate our contract with the CSU to continue their administrative support!

Financially, the Board supported the collective by assuming the costs of our Winter 2022 Volunteer Appreciation Party and approving an inflation-related pay raise.

Materially, the Board approved of the design of the t-shirts we're giving away today at our AGM as well as of the purchase of stools to reduce strain on shorter volunteers serving our lunches.

Board member since 2020, Tate Weinstein, resigned from the Board to continue his professional and academic development. We would like to thank Tate for his years of service on the People's Potato Board. You will be missed!

As the People's Potato continues to adjust as the pandemic continues, its Board of Directors will aim to continue aiding the Worker Collective in whatever capacity possible.

Garden

During the Summer and Fall semesters, the People's Potato coordinates a garden space on Loyola campus. The garden provides a space for volunteers to learn about organic gardening, as well as a source of free organic vegetables and herbs for our volunteers, other aligned food security organizations, as well as our own kitchen.

In 2022, The People's Potato Garden began work with Concordia University's new administrator position, Urban Agriculture Liaison, to obtain a new and larger composting bin structure. As well as working with the University Liaison, we began organizing with other Loyola campus-based gardening groups in the Garden Groups Advocacy Committee to share resources such as high grade compost, wood chips for mulch, and bed-breaking tools.

Garden coordinator and collective member, Eseosa Idemudia, was featured in the Montreal Gazette as well as the Concordian weekly e-newsletter, NOW for their work in the garden!

During the 2022 growing season, over 20 pounds of organic medicinal plants were gathered and dried by CultivAction co-founder, Nico Schutte, for free tisanes available in the Concordia Greenhouse. Over 100 lbs of organic garlic were grown and harvested from our garden space for use in our daily meals during the beginning of the Fall semester. Over 300 pounds of organic produce and herbs were grown, harvested, and processed from our garden space for use in our daily meals during the beginning of the Fall semester. In addition, an estimated 300 pounds of organic produce was shared with our garden volunteers as well as with the local community with regular drop-offs at the community fridge located outside of Cafe 92 on Sherbrooke.

Cultivation member and fellow garden worker, Nico Schutte, also made a zine about the perennial plants in our garden space that is available on our website.

Volunteer

Despite the return to campus in the latter half of the 2022 Winter semester, volunteer presence was hurt by the pandemic. In the winter semester, the kitchen often operated with at most one or two volunteers, with collective members often having to stand in to serve at our daily meal service. The lack of volunteers to help prep and serve our meal service deeply affected our capacity to meet the demand of the community. At this time, we continued to carry out bi-weekly orientations for new volunteers to ensure that new volunteers were properly introduced to the kitchen space and were familiar with our kitchen and volunteer protocols.

In the Fall semester, we changed several policies in the kitchen to encourage volunteers to stay longer and rekindle the sense of community that was (and is) such an important part of our space. Namely, we moved our orientation process online by creating a Google form with our kitchen/volunteer protocols and removed the need for new

volunteers to participate in an in-person orientation. We also reintroduced drop-in volunteering from the line and modified our COVID-19 restrictions to allow volunteers to eat in the volunteer room again.

While these changes helped us increase the number of volunteers we had with us in the kitchen on a given day, we still struggled to keep a consistent volunteer base. Consistent support in the kitchen predominantly came from our stagiaires from Summit School, who were a huge, huge help to ensure our service started on time.

With the return to campus, however, we were able to host two in-person volunteer appreciation parties for our volunteers - the first since the pandemic began.

Conflict Resolution

In the winter semester of 2022, we began working with student consultants studying Human Systems Interventions (HSI), in an effort to implement improvements to our internal organizational structures. Through meetings and interviews with them, we identified three main areas where improvement was needed, namely: communication, challenges brought on by the pandemic, and clarity of structure, roles and responsibilities. Following the interviews and meetings, the HSI consultants made several suggestions, including: creating firmer onboarding guidelines and facilitating institutional knowledge transfer between newer and older collective members, using an internal task manager or follow-through documents, as well as implementing workshops to address internal group dynamics and increase the functioning of the group.

We implemented several of these suggestions in the following semester. First and foremost, the Conflict Resolution portfolio has begun facilitating Collective Development Days (CDDs), about once every two months. These are spaces to discuss internal dynamics and issues, and spend time addressing them together.

We look forward to continuing to have Collective Development Days, with more topics coming into clear focus as we continue to facilitate discussions and make space for really digging into internal dynamics. For example, we are looking forward to having meetings that will focus on updating our internal policies, having anti-oppression workshops, and enabling continued follow-up on how the internal changes we've begun implementing are working out for the collective.

Finance

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 (SLBO Accounting) to gather all necessary data for quarterly reports, 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.

Every year The People's Potato typically sees an increase of 3% in revenues. For 2022, we did not see any increase. In fact our revenues were \$23,000 lower than predicted. The People's Potato has an indexed fee-levy which usually means we can predict our revenues with some accuracy. That being said due to enrollment being less than that of 2021 and hardship of the economy we did not see the numbers we had hoped for. Another thing of note was that our fee-levy opt outs were over \$19,000! The highest we have seen as of yet.

2022 was our first year back to "normal" since the beginning of the pandemic with a full year of in-person lunch service. Moving away from our pandemic food basket program means that our budget lines have started to shift back to what we have traditionally seen in a pre-pandemic time.

Despite our revenues being lower than predicted we ended our year with a net income of \$35,000. The reason for this surplus has to do with having two collective members on leave for 3 months and that we budgeted to be serving 5 days a week but only served 4. These factors have combined to produce total assets of nearly \$790,000.