
YEAR 2023

**THE
PEOPLE'S
POTATO**

ANNUAL REPORT

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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 semesters, the People's Potato hosts food-related workshops, coordinates solidarity servings for student groups and community organizations, as well as providing a bi-monthly emergency food basket program on Fridays. During the Summer semester, the People's Potato coordinates a community garden project that provides a space for volunteers learn about growing their own food (and take some home of course!) as well as providing produce to other food security projects and 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, beginning with 3 days of lunch service. In 2022, we increased our in-person meal service to 4 days of lunch service.

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.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2023?

i. Year End Accomplishments

- We applied and were granted the Community Services Recovery Fund grant from the Red Cross, where the goal was to help organizations recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on their organizations. The grant activities therefore were focused on internal development and strengthening our organizational structures to be more resilient!
 - As a result, this year we focused our efforts inward to strengthen our organizational structures and decrease worker burnout.
 - We participated in an organizational burnout workshop, which prompted us to reflect on our current work structures and brainstorm ways to make them more sustainable.
 - We initiated working with a policy consultant from Social Impact Consulting to update and re-vamp our policy package, which was lengthy and outdated.
- We realized we were the lowest paid fee-levy group at Concordia, and voted to increase our wages to reflect a living wage and the standard wage that other fee-levies were being paid (\$25/hr).
- We made fun People's Potato merch t-shirts!
- We collaborated on a Fire Cider making workshop with Frigo Vert in the fall, which used horseradish grown in our garden over the summer!
- We saw an increase in the number of regular volunteers coming into the kitchen!
- We had two great volunteer parties each semester and got to thank our volunteers for their support.
- All our staff members received Concordia's emergency preparedness certification.
- We got our zine rack back up and running, ultimately giving out thousands of zines focused on popular education and radical politics (both local and global in scope).
- We started working more closely with student organizers to feed people at demonstrations across the city (both on and off Concordia campuses) for issues that align with our political values, including: defund the police demonstrations, SPHR organizations, counter-trans protests, and more
- We did several special servings last year, including vegan banh mi, a lunar new year serving, veggie pulled pork burgers, and burritos!
- We did LOTS of solidarity servings this year, serving food for different student and community groups and organizations!
- We started having ABCompost collect compost from our kitchen this year!
- We received a lot of locally grown produce donations from Co-op Cultivation!

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2023?

ii. Trials and Tribulations

- Several collective members left the People's Potato, including some senior members who possessed a lot of valuable institutional knowledge and experience.
- As a collective, we realized we were burning out and our internal organizational structures were not super robust to make the transition of those senior collective members leaving easy.
- For example, two of the senior collective members who left the Potato were also the senior members of the finance portfolio, leaving two new members, who were in the midst of being trained, to learn and take over our finances.
- Another example - senior collective members who previously maintained our Board communications left the collective and/or went on leave for significant periods of time, leading to a breakdown in Board and Collective communication.
- Challenges such as the above forced us to reckon with the lack of institutional knowledge transfer between older and newer collective members, as well as the burnout ensuing from being understaffed for a significant period of time.
- Despite this being challenging, it also coincided with receiving the CSRF grant that was focused on building more robust internal structures, enabling us to really face these challenges head on.
- We hired two new collective members at the end of 2023!

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2023?

iii. Goals for 2024

- To complete the CSRF grant projects, including:
- Completing the policy consultation work with Social Impact Consulting and ultimately have an updated policy package and by-laws.
- Financial training for the new Finance portfolio.
- Conflict resolution training for the whole collective.
- First aid training (both physical and mental first aid) for the whole collective.
- Improve the Board structures and training, and improve our communication channels with our board.
- Increase volunteer presence in the kitchen and the garden even more!
- Create more sustainable work structures and streamline our internal organizational processes (example, fully utilizing Google workspace for easier task management, making our shifts and day-to-day scheduling more sustainable for workers).
- Return to a fully staffed collective and potentially hire an additional eleventh collective member.

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

i. Kitchen and Food Bank

This year, our kitchen portfolio continued to maintain the kitchen equipment and stock of dry goods, produce, and cleaning equipment, for the continuation of both of our daily lunch service and bi-monthly food basket service. We also continued to routinely receive donations from Moisson Montreal to support our daily service as well as to be re-distributed through our bi-monthly food baskets.

We did require repairs to be made on our steampots and the oven doors in the fall semester of 2023, which were carried out by Choquette, the company who installed these equipment. We also switched produce providers from JG Fruits to Can-Am, which has led to our saving \$150-200 per order since. This was a recommendation from the Hive - thanks!

Carter designed a knife cabinet for our kitchen 3 years ago and finally after 3 years of back and forth with carpentry concordia, accomplished having our new knife cabinet installed in the kitchen! yay!

Our emergency food basket program continues to be in high demand, with more people in line than there are baskets. This reflects the impacts of rising food prices and the rising cost of living in general, which only makes higher demands on our services. We currently make about 120 food baskets every other week, increasing to 120 each week for the last month of the semester. Our goal in the future is to increase that number and/or the frequency of the food basket pick-up so we can meet the demand for these services, but it was challenging to do that this year with the unforeseen staffing, capacity and burnout issues we faced, as mentioned earlier in the report.

We have continued to serve an average of ~400 people per day with our daily lunch service, so the numbers have remained relatively consistent since we returned to four days in 2022. As we will mention later in this report, the volunteer presence in the kitchen has continued to improve, and the kitchen feels more alive than ever! Additionally, though one of our goals last year was to return to the pre-COVID times of 5 days of lunch service, the collective remained at 4 days for the duration of 2023.

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

i. Kitchen and Food Bank (cont.)

We returned to four full days in 2022 with hopes of returning to five full days of lunch service in 2023. This did not happen, primarily as a result of lack of capacity due to collective members leaving, as well as receiving a large grant focusing on internal development (discussed in more detail later in this report) which required our labor to be directed towards that. In working on those grant projects, we participated in a workshop on sustainable work practices and also determined that we need to build up our internal work practices before we can expand our practices. We currently prioritize activities beyond just our lunch service, such as our emergency food basket program, solidarity servings, and workshops, and to continue to do those things with our current capacity, the fifth day of lunch service did not seem possible. Though it is worth noting that we are still using the fifth day to meet our community's needs in a variety of ways, and we would ultimately like to serve five days when it is within our capacity as an organization.

We worked with a number of organizations in Montreal this year doing solidarity servings, including:

- The Refugee Centre
- Trans* Dinner (Independent Organizers)
- McGill Food Security Coalition
- Prisoner Correspondence Project
- QPIRG Concordia
- Pan Asian Collective
- Defund the Police festival
- Le Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC)
- QPIRG McGill
- Trans day of remembrance
- Palestine Solidarities/Marches
- Concordia Student Union
- Arts and Science Students Association
- Fine Arts Student Association
- SSMU
- Cegep Vieux Montreal
- Palestinian solidarity art event at La Centrale
- Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society (SACOMSS)
- Le Petit Velo Rouge (LPVR)
- Pick Bloc
- Palestine Youth Movement
- SPHR Concordia
- SPHR McGill
- Jane's Walk

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

ii. Community Engagement

Education

One of the main ways that we engage with our community is through 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 one to two workshops per semester.

In February of 2023, we hosted a workshop led by one of our own collective members, Simona, where she taught (in the spirit of zero waste) how to make gluten free and vegan apple muffins, and re-use the apple scraps to make vinegar.

Later in April, we had one of the co-founding members of Co-op CultivAction, nico schutte, lead an herbal medicine workshop on how to make oxymels, a traditional medicine made from vinegar, honey, and herbs that were grown in the People's Potato garden and at Co-op CultivAction farm at the Concordia Loyola campus.

In September, we participated in QPIRG-Concordia's Dis/Orientation program, which is a series of events and workshops for new Concordia students to introduce them to the rad student groups and activism happening on campus - this year's theme was "Thriving in Solidarity". We led a discussion-based workshop on food insecurity and food justice in the Montreal- and Concordia-specific contexts, including a history of how the Potato came to be, and then we cooked a meal for the next workshop in the Dis/Orientation series that was held after us, which focused on how to act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Finally, in October, we co-hosted a workshop with Frigo Vert, led by Hunter, an herbal medicinal teacher there, on how to make Fire Cider, which is an herbal folk medicine containing apple cider vinegar, hot peppers, horseradish, cinnamon, and more. Participants used horseradish grown at the People's Potato garden over the summer!

Additionally, our zine rack has been consistently filled (and emptied) over the course of the year, with thousands of zines being distributed to the community on topics ranging from police abolition to Indigenous solidarity to food justice.

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

ii. Community Engagement (cont.)

Volunteer

In the beginning of the year, some of the challenges we faced with decreased volunteer presence (as a result of COVID-19) persisted, though it definitely seemed to be trending upwards as we began to see newer volunteers who would return consistently to the kitchen when they could! We had a fun volunteer party that was space themed at the end of the semester to thank everyone for their hard work and support. We gave out People's Potato stickers!

Over the summer in the garden, we first began to use CERVIS, the Office of Sustainability's volunteer sign-up software, which helped bring some more volunteers out to the garden. However, we faced some challenges in learning how to use the software and update it effectively for the irregular volunteer shifts we held over the summer. One of our hopes for this summer is to establish a more regular volunteer shift schedule and update it on CERVIS so we can increase the volunteers who come consistently to the garden!

In the fall of 2023, the volunteer presence really seemed to shift more positively towards having consistent volunteer presence. Part of that may have been a result of an event we hosted called "Potato After Hours," where we invited volunteers to the kitchen during non-kitchen hours to socialize with each other and decorate the front glass doors to our serving area with paint markers. We wanted to make our kitchen space both look and be more inviting to our community by bringing everyone into our space and having fun together! We also hosted in-person orientations for new and older volunteers alike to participate in, so that they could have a more hands-on approach to learning the kitchen, rather than just reading the kitchen guidelines.

We had a really fun volunteer party at the end of the year, where the theme was middle school party, we served pizza and cupcakes! Volunteers also could place orders with us for People's Potato sweatshirts. As well, we decided to get nametags for the kitchen, so that everyone could have an easier time remembering and learning each other's names. We had our volunteers fill out their magnetic nametag at the volunteer party, so it would be waiting for them in the kitchen when the semester began again the following year.

Overall, our volunteer community has seen a general increase and we are so grateful for their hard work and how much they show up for us. We put more effort into various volunteer recruitment and retention efforts, as described above, and it does seem to be paying off!

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

iii. Internal Development

This year, we continued the work of Collective Development Days (CDD) that we had begun in 2022. These CDDs are meant to help create space for conversations where we collectively try to address issues within our organization. In February, we held a CDD that focused on what it means to work in a collective, non-hierarchical structure, including discussions about how we balance self-directed work with working in coordination with each other, how we can ensure that workloads are distributed fairly and sustainably across workers in the organization, and how to build care into our practices. Some takeaways included looking into hiring external help for specific tasks, like policy, and implementing a task manager for keeping track of our tasks.

Shortly after that CDD, around March 2023, we applied for the Community Services Recovery Fund, a grant from the Red Cross and government of Canada where the goal was to help community organizations recover from the impacts of COVID-19 by focusing on strengthening internal capacity. The main purpose of our grant project “is to create new structures to re-stabilize the work place and establish sustainable work practices for worker support, focusing on worker wellbeing and organizational resilience” and overall, strengthen our internal capacity and resilience.

We were accepted by the Red Cross and granted approximately \$50,000 to work on:

- Develop a cohesive and updated policy package that includes improved COVID-19 and sick policies, workplace injury policies, policies surrounding paid breaks and time off, and anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies
- Develop hiring and training procedures across all aspects of the organization, including kitchen protocols, how-to documents, and new-hire orientations and trainings
- Develop a mental health care plan for addressing needs amongst collective members and volunteers and Specific tools and approaches in conflict resolution and working with neurodiverse individuals in the kitchen space, and First aid training for all staff.
- Modernized procedures for transferring institutional knowledge, including new internal scheduling system and task management system

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

iii. Internal Development (cont.)

We received the grant acceptance over the summer months, so workers in the garden spent some time preparing and familiarizing themselves with how to create and set up the grant projects within the organization, and our plan for how to complete these projects. In September, we began working on these projects, which included some of the volunteer and outreach projects mentioned earlier in this report; finding policy consultants to work with on updating our policy package; enrolling in Concordia's CERT-training and First Aid trainings; and finding an mental health-focused organizational consultant that we could build more sustainable work practices with.

In November, we participated in a 3-part workshop series focusing on burnout in the workplace, hosted by our organizational consultant, N. Oumou Sylla, LMFT, M.A. This workshop series really helped us to identify the areas where our work practices were causing burnout in our workers, and lead to actually creating solutions to these issues.

Our goals for the next year concerning internal development include completing all of the project activities outlined in our grant, which would represent a solidification of many conversations and themes that we have been working towards since the pandemic. This includes completing the new and improved policy package and by-laws, receiving a mental health first aid training, receiving conflict resolution trainings, implementing more efficient workflow systems and updating our internal working documentation systems to facilitate easier institutional knowledge transfer.

This portfolio also led two successful peer evaluations, one at the end of each semester, where we implemented self-reflective and peer-reflective evaluation practices to provide constructive feedback and support in reaching personal workplace related goals.

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Community Services Recovery Fund

Canada 

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

iv. Board of Directors

Last year's garden season was exciting and challenging. The climate conditions, in particular the heatwaves and air pollution followed by excessive rainfall, proved difficult to work with. The Potato Garden, along with the other Loyola Garden Groups (Co-op CultivAction, Mind Heart Mouth, City Herbal [fka City Farm School Medicinal Garden], Sankofa, and Hamidou Horticulture), continued to work together, as well as with the Concordia Urban Agriculture and Biodiversity Coordinator Jackie Martin in our shared space in the TA building on Loyola campus. Along with meeting together regularly, we shared seeds, compost, straw, farming tools, supply orders, labor, knowledge, and use of the Potato van amongst ourselves from the start to end of the 2023 season. It felt like true community-building. Thank you to all of our awesome volunteers, who helped us weather the storm of an increasingly chaotic climate! Alongside providing 400 lbs of tomatillos, scotch bonnet peppers, horseradish, raspberries, blueberries, kale, mustard greens, patty pan squash, hops, as well as a BOUNTY of medicinal and culinary herbs like mint, calendula, parsley, cilantro, and lavender, to our volunteers and kitchen; we were able to accomplish: Producing 2 cubic feet of high-quality compost solely from our own garden waste! That's equivalent to a third of last year's compost supply order! Building a compost sifter for the Potato garden with the help of the Concordia University Centre for Creative Reuse, or CUCCR. Renting a woodchipper to help the Loyola Garden Groups close down our gardens for the end of the season, as well as preparing for the beginning of the next season by composting our shredded garden waste. Processing chives, mint, kale, mustard greens, parsley, cilantro, thyme, oregano, winter savory, and other herbs in our downtown kitchen for use during our lunch service in September and October! Growing 100 pounds of organic garlic did our volunteers and kitchen! We were able to maintain the garden last summer with one full-time and two part-time collective members. This year, we hope to have three full-time collective members working in the garden, in order to bring more of our garden bounty back to our lunch service in the Fall of 2024! Please let us know if you are interested in volunteering in the garden in Spring please visit the Community Garden page on our website underneath the Programs tab!

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

v. Garden

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PORTFOLIO UPDATES

vi. 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.

The People's Potato has an indexed fee-levy which means we can predict our revenues with some accuracy. We generally predict a 3% increase every year. This year we received a 3.6% increase.

Due to uncertainty of Opt-outs from students after covid, we predicted an increase of opt-outs from \$16,000 to \$20,000. However, the rate of opt-outs actually decreased and amounted to \$14,785.

In 2023, we continued having our operations with a full year of in-person lunch service 4 days a week, and a bi-weekly food basket program.

PORTFOLIO UPDATES

vi. Finance (cont.)

This year we received a Grant from the Red Cross that focused on internal development and institutional health after covid. This year we have been allocated \$36,076. We used this funding for internal projects such as financial consultation, policy consultation, a three-part workshop on burnout prevention, amongst other projects.

Typically, all collective members will receive an annual pay correction to match predicted inflation for the following year. Noticing a trend of the Peoples Potato ending the year with a large surplus of net income, we decided to invest in the sustainability of the collective. Having discussed wages with other fee-levies we had noticed that the collective members at the Potato were being paid significantly less than other groups. We worked with our board to increase the wages of our Collective members from \$22 to \$25 an hour, what we deemed to be a livable wage in 2023. This pay correction is an exception, and for the year of 2024 we will be resuming matching inflation.

Because of the grant we received, overall our income was disproportionately higher than most years. However this gained revenue can be reflected in the additional expenses found under Mediation and consultation.

We ended the year off with a new income of \$26,702.52, which will be used in future projects and services at the potato. Our assets at the end of 2023 totalled to \$785,817 up from \$759,119 in 2022.

People's Potato



BRING YOUR OWN CONTAINER

graphic by Paris Kokkas