

# 2019 Annual Report

The People's Potato

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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 every regular school day from 12:30 to 2pm on the 7<sup>th</sup> 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 and serves approximately 450 meals per day. Apart from food service, the Potato is also committed to the broader struggles of anti-poverty, anti-oppression, social justice and environmental sustainability.

## Some History

In 1999, a group of Concordia students 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 employing ten people and collaborating with a strong volunteer base.

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. Last summer, the People's Potato moved to a new kitchen on the 7th floor due to renovations being made by the university. This space was negotiated through talks with the University and the Concordia Student Union..

## Year End Goals for 2019

- Revisiting our values as an organization
- Opening the lines of communication within the collective
- Empowering our board to pursue new projects
- Proactively developing and implementing strategies to provide a more supportive environment for trans workers
- Adapting to and improving our new kitchen space

## Year End Goals for 2020

- Optimizing our new kitchen space once we have access to it
- Updating internal policy to better support workers' needs
- Reworking our organization to maintain services for students during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Supporting the Concordia community and the community at large during the COVID-19 pandemic

## Organizational Development

The organizational development portfolio's main responsibilities include searching for grants to further organizational goals and attending Fee-Levy Action Committee (FLAC) meetings. FLAC is a committee of different fee-levy groups who have banded together to support one another in a changing political climate that may threaten their independence.

In 2019, there was a referendum to develop an online system for opting-out of fee-levy groups. Due to this, much of the organizational development portfolio's work was focused on FLAC during the 2019-2020 academic year.

In response to the referendum, fee-levy groups came together to create a "Vote No to Online Opt-outs" campaign to proactively limit the potentially harmful impacts of this system. The organizational development portfolio worked with the collective to support the "Vote No" campaign by making announcements in the lunch line-up to raise awareness about fee levy groups, how their funding works, and the challenges and risks of having an online opt-out system. The referendum to make an online system for opt-outs was passed and is in the process of being developed by the CSU and Concordia Administration.

In developing the system, the CSU consulted with some fee-levy groups to get their input on features they would like to be included in the online opt-out system. The organizational development portfolio created a list of what should be included to ensure students make an informed decision prior to opting out and shared these demands with the CSU.

Future projects of the organizational development portfolio will include:

- Leading collective discussions on creating and updating the organization's values and priorities for the upcoming academic year and for hiring processes
- Applying for funding of Potato positions through the work study program as needed

- Assisting collective members with grant applications for new projects that further the organization's goals

## Finances

The finance committee focuses on organizing the bookkeeping and most 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

This past fiscal year (January-December) the People's Potato ended with a budget surplus of about \$60 000.00, which surpassed the surplus we projected four-fold. This is due in large part to the difficulty of predicting our fee-levy revenues, which are influenced by enrollment, opt-out, and inflation rates each year. Because of this uncertainty, we budgeted conservatively in order to avoid ending the year with a deficit.

For the 2020 budget year, we are predicting modest inflation-related increases to both our undergraduate and graduate fee levies. In the past, we have had difficulty predicting these amounts, but thanks to more detailed enrolment information from the Dean's office, we believe our estimates will be more accurate for the coming year.

For 2020, we have opted to spend more on produce, which has been rising in cost dramatically for the last several years. We have also doubled the budget for our emergency food basket service, in order to increase the number of baskets, as well as improve and diversify the types of foods included in the basket.

Other areas of spending include an increase to the Collective's wage, in order to mitigate the current housing crisis, as well as to bring the wage in line with other similar non-profit jobs in the city.

Finally, although we saw a significant decrease in the number of student opt-outs this last year, the forthcoming online opt-out system is sure to have an as-yet-unknown impact on

our fee levy revenues. As such, we have begun strategizing around how to manage the possible significant blow to our funding. We would also like to mention the enormous support that we received from Moisson Montreal, who contributed food (perishable and non-perishable) to the People's Potato in the past year valuing up to \$ 206,419. We thank them for their hard work and collaboration with Montreal's community groups!

## Kitchen

Our kitchen is busy almost every day of the week. Not only do we prepare a daily lunch service Mondays through Fridays, our kitchen is also used for solidarity catering for student, community, and grassroots organizations. We also host regular free workshops in our kitchen space and use it as a pick-up point for emergency food baskets.

Every month or so, we at the Potato like to prepare servings in order to profile causes that we support or offer some differently yummy! Winter Semester of 2019, we were able to prepare a different Indigineous inspired food for First Voices Week including Three Sisters Stew and Bannock! We also had a Yemeni serving seeking to raise awareness of and raise funds for the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. And to celebrate our last day in our old kitchen space, we prepared a Loaded Nacho Poutine that was \*chef's kiss\* awesome! As we settled into our new kitchen space in the Fall Semester of 2019, we had three special servings. The first, a welcome back to campus burrito special serving. The second, the Burri(no!) serving was a mobilization campaign to fight against the implementation of an online opt-out system, which we see as detrimental to Concordia Student Group's ongoing work. We were able to prepare over 400 burritos to serve our line as well as handing out burritos and promotional materials in the JMSB Building. And to finish off our semester, we served Vegan Burgers and Fries.

Our last semester in the old kitchen space was stressful due to the construction constantly changing how our space functioned and how we could access it, but we are grateful for having had access to that space for so long (almost 19 years!) We are also grateful we were able to secure a new space through negotiation with University as well as the Concordia Student Union. Since our move in the summer, we had been working on optimizing our space for our regular daily servings. So we have not been able to lend out our kitchen to external groups with similar mandates as we are internally negotiating how best to support other groups while securing our kitchen space for the years to come. In light of the current pandemic, we are hopeful of returning to the kitchen to continue our mission of feeding Concordia students and the community at large healthy food, be it through a food bank service, or our previous meal distribution style.

## Volunteer Coordination

The Potato is able to exist and fulfill its mandate because of the countless hours dedicated by our many volunteers. Our volunteers and Stagiaires help make it possible to serve over 400 people every weekday.

Volunteers are welcome anytime between 9-3 during our workdays to help with our daily preparation of meals. This can be veggie preparation, serving and cleaning up. Additionally, volunteers are a crucial help with our emergency food basket service. This year, we continued receiving student interns from schools and organizations such as John Grant, Summit, Venture High, and Innovation Youth, who complete their placement with us.

On our part, we hold volunteer orientations at the beginning of the Fall and Winter semesters to familiarize new and potential volunteers with the layout of our kitchen, outline kitchen safety and to take suggestions that may improve the general functioning of our kitchen. We also hold volunteer appreciation events at the end of each semester where we get the chance to give back to our volunteers for all their hard work and dedication.

In 2020, we hope to continue establishing a strong base of motivated volunteers despite this pandemic.

## Education

As always, 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 represent also a great opportunity to have volunteers and/or community members share their skills. We usually aim to offer around three workshops per semester - unfortunately this year, due to the pandemic, we were able to only host two workshops in the Winter semester. Our last workshop for this semester would have been a collaboration with Midnight Kitchen and would have centered around urban agriculture especially for BIPOC communities. In the time we did have, though, we managed to offer wonderful workshops on bread making, vegan and raw pies and vegan empanadas! All of our workshops were well attended and participants seemed quite satisfied with the results. We hope to be able to hold workshops again in the upcoming semester, depending on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Outreach

This year through the work of the Outreach portfolio we continued to offer solidarity catering to groups whose values aligned with ours, solidifying our relationships. As other years, alongside Frigo Vert and Midnight Kitchen, we served food for the Anti-Colonial dinner that takes place in November at the Native Friendship Centre. In addition, we built on our decision to offer monetary support to community groups and organisations who are struggling, choosing to make a donation of 500\$ every two months during our work year. We have donated \$350 to AGIR: Action LGBTQ avec les ImmigrantEs et RéfugiéEs, an autonomous non-profit organization, by and for the LGBTQ migrant community living in Montreal. We have donated \$350 to Solidarity Across Borders, a migrant justice network based in Montreal. We have donated \$250 to the safrrr.space workbook development initiative by a former collective member. And we have donated \$350 to Taking What We Need, an informal Montreal community group dedicated to helping low income transwomen get what they need through discretionary funding. As soon as COVID hit, we saw a large need for funding from front-line groups supporting marginalised communities; for this reason, we decided to offer 2000\$ each to Solidarity Across Borders and Projets Autochtones du Québec. In addition, we have partnered with Midnight Kitchen and the Concordia Food Coalition to continue offering food while our kitchen and offices remain closed. In these last few weeks we have also started working on revamping our website - stay tuned!

## Garden

The People's Potato garden, located at Loyola, 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.

Last year we organized a few workshops/events for people to get familiar with the abc of small scale gardening. After ending our collaboration with City Farm School who grew our garlic on their land for a number of years we started growing our own garlic. In the summer of 2019 we were able to grow ourselves a considerable amount of organic garlic that was later used in our kitchen.

As of 2019 we decided to up the total hours of garden work to 50 and have two workers to be able to increase production but make garden work easier.

This year due to restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic we had to make the difficult decision to close our garden to volunteers and shifted our focus to distributing most of our harvest to food banks and organizations serving marginalized communities.

As restrictions loosen we hope to be able to welcome volunteers again in the safest possible way.

## Board of Directors

The People Potato Board initiated various programs and participated in various activities with the Collective:

1. We have volunteered prepping food and serving;
2. We have volunteered with the Potato food bank;
3. Tupperware initiative: the Board bought tupperware (around \$500) and sold tupperware during meals;
4. Some of initiatives did not work out: such as providing community utensils and dishes for meals but the utensils and dishes kept disappearing;
5. The Board took part in a Board training workshop;
6. Some members of the board helped at solidarity events such as the Anti-Colonial Dinner;
7. Some members helped with Moisson pick-ups (Moisson Montreal is where the Potato gets the bulk of their food for meals and the foodbank);
8. Some of us participated in amending parts of the Potato constitution;
9. Help prepare for the Volunteer Appreciation Party
10. Participate in the Grands Échanges.