

2020 Annual Report

The People's Potato

1455 de Maisonneuve O., Suite #700

Montreal, Qc H3G 1M8



Table of Contents

[Who Are We?](#)

[Some History](#)

[Year End Accomplishments for 2020](#)

[Year End Goals for 2021](#)

[Before the Pandemic, and the Aftermath](#)

[Food Bank](#)

[FLAC and Online Opt-outs](#)

[Kitchen](#)

[Volunteer Coordination](#)

[Education](#)

[Outreach / Solidarity](#)

[Garden](#)

[Finances](#)

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. We currently serve approximately 225 people every two weeks with our emergency food basket delivery and pick-up program. 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 seven people and—pre-pandemic—collaborating with a strong volunteer base. Since the pandemic started, we haven't been able to interact with our volunteers because of stringent university space protocols and the collective misses our volunteers very much!

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. In summer 2019, the People's Potato was moved to a brand new kitchen, right in the middle of 7th floor of the Hall Building. In mid-March 2020, we lost access to our kitchen space, because of safety protocols in response to the pandemic, and were only able to regain access at the start of Fall semester 2020. In spite of these setbacks, the collective quickly pivoted to working remotely, and continued our food security work by supporting other food organizations who could still access their spaces, namely the Concordia Food Coalition, Midnight Kitchen and Solidarity Across Borders. We also used access to our Loyola Campus garden space to supplement Midnight Kitchen emergency food baskets.

Year End Accomplishments for 2020

- Optimized our new kitchen space once we regained access to it. Notably, we bought a better sound system (funded by the Board of Directors) to allow people to play music on our speakers without being directly attached to them, which has broken phones in the past
- Updated internal policy to better support workers' needs in light of the ongoing pandemic
- Reworked our organization to maintain services for students during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Supported the Concordia community, and the community at large, during the COVID-19 pandemic

Year End Goals for 2021

Continuing to maintain and expand our services for students during the COVID-19 pandemic

- 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
- Revisiting our values as an organization
- Strengthening our internal policy
- Figuring out how to serve meals to students once more and how to allow volunteers into our space while maintaining COVID safety protocols!

Before the Pandemic, and the Aftermath

At the start of 2020, the People's Potato was operating in our normal capacity - though still adjusting to and optimizing our new kitchen space, that we had moved into the summer of 2019. We were serving up to 450 vegan lunches daily, providing emergency food baskets to 100 people every two weeks, preparing solidarity servings for other grassroots organizations that follow our mandate, and hosting monthly workshops on food preparation.

In mid-March 2020, the collective was forced to work mostly from home, due to loss of access to our kitchen and office spaces in the Hall Building. In this time, we focused on improving internal policy, conducted our meetings via Zoom, and shared resources with other community groups that mirrored our mandate. A few collective members worked in-person with other community groups, namely Midnight Kitchen, and at the very beginning, the Concordia Food Coalition, providing our van and our people power to support them in their emergency food basket programs, which increased exponentially at the start of the pandemic. We also organized our very first online Annual General Meeting, which was a success.

During the summer of 2020, most of the collective went on leave. Karen and Iman spent a lot of time negotiating with the University administration, and with the support of the Dean of Students Office, we regained access to our garden on Loyola Campus. COVID-19 protocols restricted our ability to have volunteers in the garden, so we maintained it with the labour of only two staff members. We managed to harvest many waves of delicious veggies and herbs, which we shared with Midnight Kitchen to help supplement their free food baskets, to the larger community.

Fall semester 2020, most of our staff returned though we were sad to see Ixel, AJ, and Coco leave. After many negotiations with the university, and again, with the help of the Dean of Students Office and the EHS ([Environmental, Health & Safety](#)) department, we finally regained access to our kitchen and office spaces, in the Hall Building.

Once we were allowed back into our space, we worked on strategies to increase worker safety, in addition to following government protocols. The collective divided into two bubbles in order to maintain social distancing, so that if any one member of the collective had to self-isolate due to COVID, we could continue our services in some capacity. In addition, we tracked our movements in and out of the kitchen and offices using a schedule, invested heavily in kitchen-appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) & disinfectant, and developed policies supporting workers who may need to self-isolate due to COVID.

Food Bank

Once we regained access to our kitchen space, we started the process of building a food basket delivery program, as well as a pick-up program, located at the Frigo Vert. In this process of transitioning our services, we received so much support from the wonderful people over at Midnight Kitchen. The Midnight Kitchen had access to a space at the start of the pandemic, so they didn't skip a beat in starting their foodbank delivery service. We had access to our van and our garden. What has come out of these circumstances is the growth of our partnership, through exchanges of labor and knowledge, that benefit both of our collectives, and have made it possible to serve as many people as we can. It's also been inspiring to see how hard they work and how much love and commitment they put into what they do, and 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 receive our food baskets, and began using different applications to facilitate our delivery routes, and to organize pick-up appointments. Shalini has been our Google Sheets rock since the very beginning, so shout out to Shalini! Otherwise, the collective works on all the different aspects of preparing the baskets, physically separate in our bubbles, but together in our mission as a collective. At the end of 2020, we had over 50 households on our waiting list and are currently working on increasing our services to include those households (and possibly more as our waitlist continues growing!) while maintaining the quality of our food baskets!

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.

In Fall 2020, after much campaigning and petitioning, fee-levy groups were finally allowed to have control over the online opt-out process, which was a huge victory for fee-levy groups.

Our response to the system moving online was to create a user-friendly centralized system, on JotForm. This gives students an opportunity to get information about the student groups, and to make an informed decision about the services they would be opting out of, and how much of their money would actually be going to the groups. We found that a significant number of

students who visited the page, seemed to decide to stay opted-in, once they understood more about their services, and exactly how much money was required.

In the Fall opt-outs, 30% of the 1000 people who opted out picked and chose which groups they wanted to opt out of, and the other 70% did blanket opt-outs.

This can sound like a very large amount of blanket opt-outs, but we are confident that as students get to know the good work that student groups do, they will choose to contribute.

Kitchen

At the start of 2020, the Potato was still getting used to and optimizing our new kitchen space. As we were hitting our stride, we lost access to the university, except for exceptional visits. We used those exceptional visits to collect and distribute the food we had, to other food organizations who could use it immediately, namely Resilience Montreal.

When we regained access to our kitchen space in Fall 2020, we resumed ordering fresh produce from J&G Fruits & Légumes, bulk pulses and grains, and receiving donations from Moisson Montreal to redistribute in our food baskets.

Volunteer Coordination

Before the pandemic hit, volunteers were the lifeblood of our organization. We would not have been able to serve over 400 people a day without the hard work of our volunteers and stagiaires! Sadly, losing access to our kitchen space meant that we could no longer receive volunteers in our space, though we think that was the best decision for everyone's safety. We created a volunteer Facebook group and have sent out updates to our volunteer email list. After our Annual General Meeting in May, 2020, we hosted an online event for our volunteers, where we played games together. Although we cannot be together physically right now, we wanted to try our best to stay in touch. We, the collective, can't wait to see our volunteers again!

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 2020, due to the pandemic, we were only able to host two workshops in the Winter semester: How to Make Vegan Lime Pie in February 2020 and How to Make Vegan Empanadas in March 2020 (only a few days before the pandemic shutdown!).

Our last planned workshop for that semester would have been a collaboration with Midnight Kitchen and would have centered around urban agriculture especially for BIPOC communities. The workshops we were able to host, however, were well attended and participants seemed quite satisfied with the results. We hope to be able to hold workshops again in the future, depending on the course of the COVID-19 pandemic!

As we started up our own food basket program, we started to prepare special treats to include within them to spread a little cheer. These treats have been: spice mixes for soups and stews, and quick baking mixes for mug cakes and pancakes. We give additional instructions about how to use these treats that we include within our food baskets.

Outreach / Solidarity

At the beginning of the year, before the pandemic hit, we offered solidarity catering to groups whose values aligned with ours, including the African Students' Association of Concordia, Solidarity Across Borders, and Le Frigo Vert's Pay-What-You-Can Café, McGill's Union for Gender Empowerment, the Trout Lily Theatre Collective, and the Anti-Carceral Group. We also supplied some firewood to the Kahnawá:ke railway blockade. Once the pandemic hit, and we were locked out of our kitchen and office space, we saw a large need for funding for front-line organizations that were supporting marginalised communities; for this reason, we donated to the Concordia Food Coalition, Projets Autochtones Du Québec (PAQ), and to Solidarity Across Borders (SAB). We donated as many perishable and non-perishable food items as we could to Resilience Montreal quickly after the University shut down when we were allowed emergency access.

In November 2020, we had a photo interview with journalism student Monica Matin, during a food bank delivery week. You can see her photos of us throughout this presentation!

Also in November, Carter single-handedly made and served a hot meal at an outdoor solidarity event 'Lunch & Teach-in: Student Day of Solidarity' that was organized by Indigenous students and accomplices to Educate people on the struggles of Indigenous peoples and show solidarity with Indigenous land defenders in the fight for liberation and justice.

In the past year, we've also worked on improving our online presence by updating our website and social media more regularly, so please follow us if you haven't already! We appreciate the support for our somewhat quiet social media presence and always strive to engage more!

Garden

The People's Potato garden, located at Loyola, is (in pre-pandemic times) 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 of 2019, we decided to increase the total hours of garden work to 50 hours. This way, we could have two workers, so that we could increase production while making garden work more efficient.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we had to make the difficult decision to close our garden to volunteers. We shifted our focus to distributing our harvest to food banks and organizations serving marginalized communities, namely Midnight Kitchen. As restrictions loosen we hope to be able to welcome volunteers again in the safest possible way!

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

Despite higher than usual fee-levy opt outs, the uptick in 2020 university enrollment has allowed the People's Potato to end its 2020 fiscal year with a budget surplus of \$75,073. University contributions went up from \$371,901 in 2019 to \$387,342 in 2020.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic most of our spending shifted from cooking related expenses to food bank and restructuring of our operations. Given our increased focus on food bank deliveries and supporting other community organizations, some budget lines have seen dramatic changes, notably: food bank, truck repair and maintenance, gas and solidarities. However, our total expenses were well below our previous years', due in large part to the suspension of our daily meal program and the reduced number of collective members.

Overall, these factors have combined to produce total assets of nearly \$647,000 up dramatically from \$559,532 at the end of 2019.

Our focus has been to invest it in large one-time purchases. Several of our large pieces of equipment are nearing the ends of their lives – in particular, our vehicle, and are in need of replacement. Our aim is to spend a modest amount on these purchases – conserving the majority of our assets. For the 2021 budget year, we are predicting modest inflation-related increases to both our undergraduate and graduate fee levies. However, food prices have been rising dramatically over the last several years and are predicted to continue doing so.