



REPORT

From the office of the...

Associate Vice President: Services

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Simranjeet Singh, Associate Vice President: Services
Christina Devarapalli, Vice President (Administration)
SUBJECT: Food Collective Centre (FCC) Review
DATE: March 22nd, 2022

INTRODUCTION

To the esteemed members of the Executive Board of the McMaster Students' Union,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students' Union (MSU) service known as the Food Collective Centre (FCC). The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by Spark. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Admin, and AVP Services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Service Purpose and Mandate

FCC is one of approximately 20 student led services that are offered by the MSU. It is categorized as a Student-Life Enhancement Services under section 3.2.2 of the Operating Policy – Services. As stated in the Operating Policy – Food Collective Centre (FCC), the purpose of FCC is:

- 1.1 To coordinate the distribution of foodstuffs and other necessities to the McMaster University Community that require additional support.
- 1.2 To develop educational materials and awareness campaigns on issues such as food security and to develop interventions to build resilient food systems in the McMaster Community.

To achieve its purpose, FCC must act through the following operating parameters:

- 2.1 MSU Food Collective Center should operate year-round as a service within the McMaster Students Union;
- 2.2 MSU Food Collective Center shall ensure the distribution of food and other necessities in a secure, accessible and dignified manner on campus as needed
- 2.3 MSU Food Collective Centre shall ensure that all of the items being distributed meet standards set by relevant legislation
- 2.4 MSU Food Collective Centre shall oversee the Food Collective Centre in Bridges Café and the Good Food Box program:
 - 2.4.1 The Food Collective Centre and Good Food Box Program shall operate as outlined by the Food Collective Centre Memorandum of Understanding, and in job description of the Good Food Coordinator
- 2.5 MSU Food Collective Centre shall oversee the McMaster Meal Exchange Chapter:
 - 2.5.1 Meal Exchange Programming shall operate as outlined by the job description of the Assistant Director

Service Structure

FCC is overseen by a Director and Assistant Director in part-time paid positions who then oversee a series of volunteers in various roles. The Director plays the main leadership role, with their purpose being to allow FCC to achieve its mandate and give support to the other executives in fulfilling their responsibilities. All roles as per the service operating policy detailed below:

3.1 The Director, who shall:

- 3.1.1 Be responsible for managing all activities of the MSU Food Collective Centre;
- 3.1.2 Perform duties outlined in the MSU Food Collective Centre Director job description;
- 3.1.3 Be hired by a hiring committee struck by the Executive Board that shall consist of:
 - 3.1.3.1 The outgoing Director,
 - 3.1.3.2 The Vice President (Administration)
 - 3.1.3.3 One (1) Executive Board Member

3.2 The Assistant Director, who shall:

- 3.2.1 Be responsible for overseeing the Meal Exchange McMaster Chapter;
- 3.2.2 Assist the MSU Food Collective Centre Director in overseeing all other activities of the MSU Food Collective Centre;
- 3.2.3 Be responsible in ensuring that the expectation outlined in the job description of the Promotions Coordinator and Events Coordinator are met;
- 3.2.4 Perform duties outlined in the MSU Food Collective Centre Assistant Director Job description
- 3.2.5 Be hired by a hiring committee struck by the Executive Board that shall consist of:
 - 3.2.5.1 The incoming MSU Food Collective Centre Director;
 - 3.2.5.2 The outgoing MSU Food Collective Centre Assistant Director;
 - 3.2.5.3 The Vice President (Administration)
 - 3.2.5.4 One (1) Executive Board Member

3.3 The Community Kitchen Coordinator, who shall:

- 3.3.1 Be responsible for overseeing the Mac Community Kitch(in);
- 3.3.2 Perform duties outlined in the Community Kitchen Coordinator Job description;
- 3.3.3 Be hired by a hiring committee that shall consists of:
 - 3.3.3.1 The incoming MSU Food Collective Centre Director;
 - 3.3.3.2 The outgoing MSU Food Collective Centre Director
 - 3.3.3.3 The outgoing Community Kitchen Coordinator

3.4 The Good Food Coordinator, who shall:

- 3.4.1 Be responsible for overseeing the operations of the physical Food Collective Centre and Good Food Box Program.
- 3.4.2 Perform duties outlined in the Good Food Coordinator job description
- 3.4.3 Be hired by a committee that shall consist of:
 - 3.4.3.1. The incoming MSU Food Collective Centre Director;
 - 3.4.3.2 The outgoing MSU Food Collective Centre Director;
 - 3.4.3.3 The outgoing Good Food Coordinator

3.5 The Promotions Coordinator, who shall:

- 3.5.1 Be responsible for overseeing promotional activities for MSU Food Collective Centre
- 3.5.2 Perform duties outlined in the Promotions Coordinator job description
- 3.5.3 Be selected by the incoming MSU Food Collective Centre director through an interview an application process

3.6 The Events Coordinator, who shall:

- 3.6.1 Be responsible for event planning activity for Food Collective Centre;
- 3.6.2 Perform duties outlined in the Events Coordinator job description;
- 3.6.3 Be selected by the incoming MSU Food Collective Centre director through an application and interview process

INTERNAL RESEARCH

General Student Body Survey

The general student body survey consisted of 47 questions to gauge how effectively FCC delivers its services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the student body perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where there exist areas to make service delivery or communication with the student body more efficient. There were 264 responses to the survey, with the slight majority from first year students. As this represents only about 1% of the student body, this is not a highly representative sample.

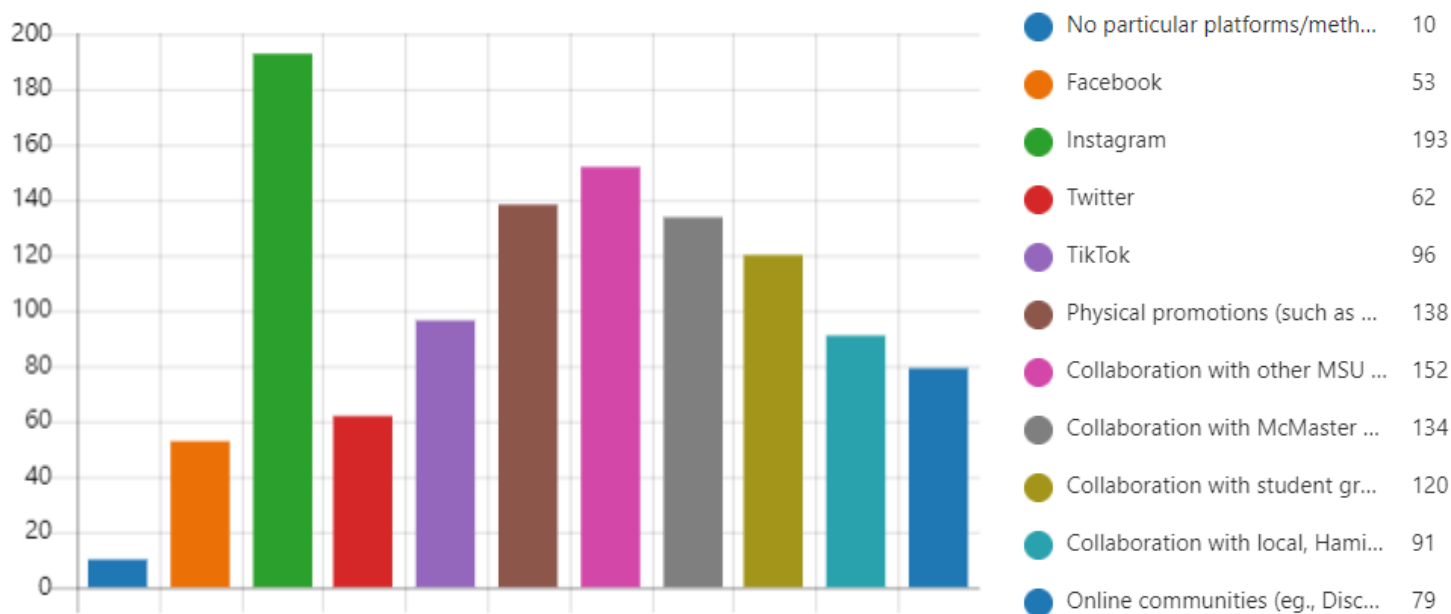
The greatest number of responses came from Science students (38%) followed by Social Science and Engineering students (both about 13%). Approximately 89% of respondents were domestic students from Ontario, with those from out of province and international students making up the remainder.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the three largest ethno-racial groups were White/European (38%), East or Southeast Asian (23%), and South Asian (22%). Cisgender women made up the supermajority of respondents (76%) with most of the remainder made up of cisgender men, and about 6% made up of individuals of various non-cisgender identities. About 81% of respondents were heterosexual, with the remaining 19% comprising various homosexual, asexual, and bi/poly/pansexual identities.

Each of the three options of residence (those who live in McMaster residences, students who live in off-campus housing, and students who commute) were selected by approximately 1/3 of respondents. Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$100,000 to \$150,000 though likely at the lower end. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four to five individuals.

Generally, respondents felt that the role of FCC (from the definition provided) was appropriate and should be expanded. Most stated they had first learned of FCC through either the MSU Instagram, the FCC Instagram page, or friends and acquaintances, though almost ½ of respondents did not know of FCC prior to the survey. The fact that such a large portion of survey respondents did not know of FCC prior to the survey may be the result of the greater number of respondents, meaning a greater portion of the student body unfamiliar with MSU services in general took part in the FCC survey. The same three methods of communication (MSU Instagram, FCC Instagram, and friends/acquaintances) were also the main means by which respondents continued to hear of or interact with FCC after having already learned of the service. Use of Instagram, use of physical promotions, and collaboration with both MSU and McMaster services were generally described as the most impactful means by which respondents felt FCC can increase its profile. Collaboration with student clubs, use of TikTok, and collaborations with Hamilton Community groups were also noted as areas where respondents felt FCC should invest future resources to increase its impact.

Figure 1. A figure to show platforms/methods which general student body survey respondents believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.



Only approximately 26% of respondents were aware of Lockers of Love. Only about 21% of the proportion aware of Lockers of Love in fact made use of the program. When reviewing the reasons for use or lack of use, we see very positive feedback. Income insecurity, the variety of culturally-specific food options, quality of food options, and convenience were all cited approximately equally as reasons for use of Lockers of Love, showing that the program indeed is fulfilling its purpose regarding food insecurity gaps that exist within the McMaster community. 85% of respondents who did not use Lockers of Love but were aware of the program decided to forgo using the service as they simply had a lack of need. The remaining 15% felt there was a lack of diverse food options, a low quality of produce, and a lack of convenience. However, when comparing the proportion who did not use the service due to perceived low quality of the program, they are outnumbered by those who did use the program due to perceived high quality by a ratio of 2:1. Therefore, while improvements can be made to quality, diversity, and accessibility of the Lockers of Love program, overall, we see positive response from the community at large. There was widespread support for an online option to be continued as a means by which Lockers of Love gift cards are received, with 60% supporting this model, 14% supporting the previous in-person model, and 26% showing no preference. Thus, further expansion and focus on the online method of delivery is prudent moving forward. More than 95% of all respondents who were previously aware of Lockers of Love (no matter if they did or did not use the service) recommended the program, signifying how positively the service is received and potential for expansion moving forward.

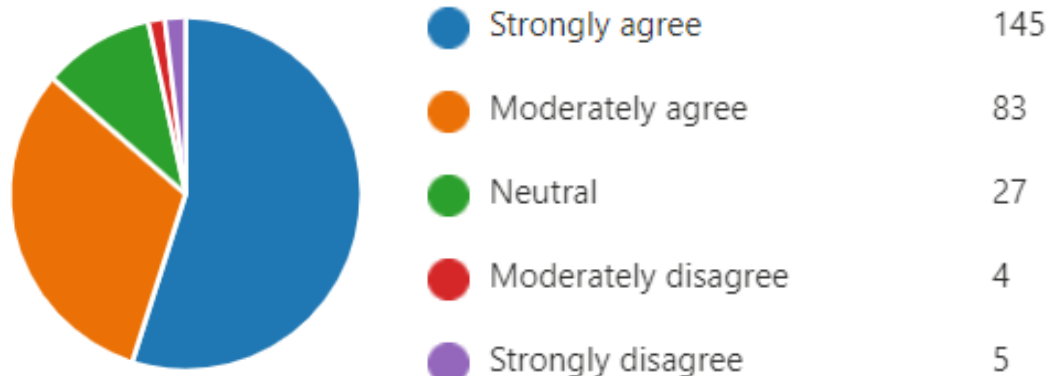
Figure 2. A figure to show student preferences for in-person or online models for Lockers of Love.



Only approximately 17% of respondents were aware of the Community Kitchen Workshops. Only 1/3 of these individuals made use of the program. When reviewing the reasons for use or lack of use by those knowledgeable about the workshops' existence, most respondents were decided against attending workshops as a result of other programs they were enrolled in, conflicts with classes and extracurriculars, or simply due to a lack of need. 0 reporting their lack of engagement as being motivated by perceived lack of program quality. 100% of respondents either moderately or strongly agreed that workshops made use of culturally-specific and equitable methods in instruction, with approximately 85% feeling attending the workshops benefitted their cooking skills. Out of all survey respondents, more than 52% of respondents gave preference for in-person programs to be brought back in the future, with 13% preferring online, 23% giving no preference, and only 12% stating they would not attend workshops of either type.

Moving to the Good Food Box, 23% had previous knowledge of this program existing. Only 1/3 of these individuals made use of the program, though there was unanimous recommendation of the program by these users to other students. Of the five metrics, Quantity, quality, cultural diversity, variety, and ease of purchase of the Good Food Box were all supported by approximately 1/5 of respondents as reasons for their use of the program. When compared to those who felt the quantity, quality, cultural diversity, variety, and ease of purchase of the Good Food Box was lacking, those who held a positive perception outnumbered detractors by a ratio of 3:1. Overall, in excess of 86% of respondents moderately or strongly recommended the Good Food Box program and hoped for its expansion.

Figure 3. A figure to show respondent sentiment on the following question, "Based on the description, pictures, and any previous experience with the Good Food Box, do you think it should be more heavily marketed and promoted to students?"



Finally, similarly positive sentiments were also given to the Cultivating Change webinar series. Only about 12.5% of respondents were aware of the webinars, but half of those individuals attended. There was unanimous recommendation of the webinar series by attendees. Variety and quality of speakers, combined with the high organizational quality and educational content of the webinars were the main reasons attendees held positive perceptions. Quality of videos and the positive environment created were also noted by respondents as favourable attributes of the webinars. Out of the respondents who were previously aware of the Cultivating Change webinars but chose not to attend, the majority (53%) did not attend due to conflicts with classes, work, or extracurriculars. Approximately 24% felt there were insufficiencies in the quality of the webinars, speakers, or the degree that webinars were welcoming to attendees, though in absolute terms, these individuals were outnumbered by 4:1 compared to those who felt the webinars excelled in the same metrics. It is important to note that 30% felt they received similar information from other sources, including from other programming of FCC, thus modifying programming and content covered by different events held by FCC may be worthwhile to ensure greater scope of knowledge can be disseminated to the community. Overall, 76% of all respondents either moderately or strongly agreed with the mission of the Cultivating Change workshops and hoped to see them expanded.

Volunteer and Executive Survey

The executive and volunteer survey consisted of 47 questions to gauge how effectively FCC's executives and volunteers view its functioning and delivery of services to the student body. This allows for reviewers to understand how the leadership and volunteers of FCC perceives the service and will allow us to gain an understanding of where areas for improvement exist. There were 13 responses to the survey, which represents approximately 35% of all executives and volunteers with FCC.

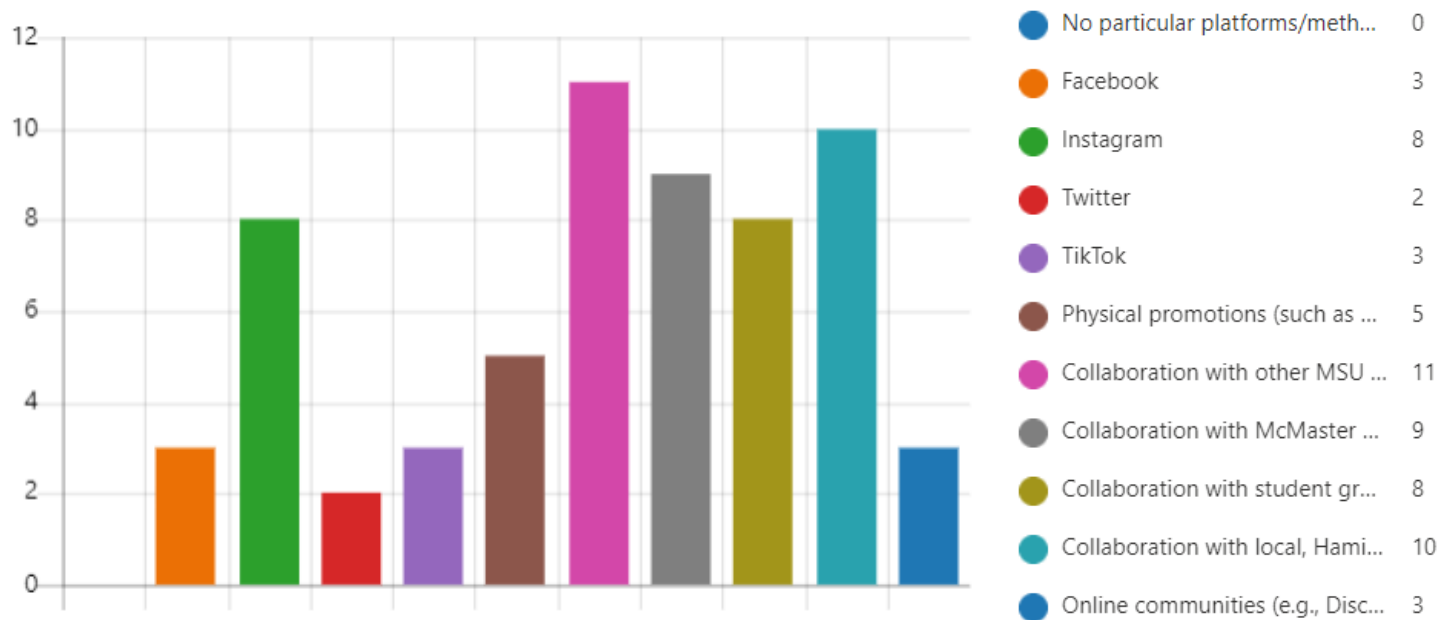
Health Science represents the faculty from which the greatest number of volunteers and executives originate, with nearly half (46%) from that faculty. Social Sciences is a distance second (23%), with the remainder of respondents evenly divided between the Science and Arts & Science faculties. Third year and fourth year students represent the years with the greatest number of respondents, with 100% of respondents being domestic students from Ontario.

In order of greatest to least number of respondents, the four ethno-racial groups in which all respondents identified were East or Southeast Asian (61%), White or European (23%), South Asian (8%), and Black or Sub-Saharan African (8%). Cisgender women made up a clear majority of respondents (92%) with all other respondents identifying as cisgender men and 0 respondents stating a non-cisgender identity. 61% of respondents were heterosexual, with the majority of the remainder having either a bi/poly/pansexual identity.

Approximately 1/3 of respondents fall in each of the three housing groups, namely those who live in off-campus housing, those that commute, and those that live in McMaster residences. Average annual family income appeared to be within the range of \$100,000 to \$150,000, likely in the middle of the range. Most respondents originated from family units composed of four to five individuals, with both parents/guardians having an average of a Bachelor's degree in education.

Generally, respondents felt that the role of FCC (from the definition provided) was appropriate, but unlike the general student body survey, were more lukewarm regarding expansion. Most stated they had first learned of FCC through the FCC Instagram. In addition to the FCC Instagram, on-campus promotional material, the MSU Instagram, FCC Facebook, and friends/acquaintances were the main means by which respondents continued to hear of or interact with FCC after having already learned of the service. Collaboration with other MSU Services, local Hamilton community clubs/groups, McMaster University services/initiatives, and student clubs/groups, as well as greater use of the FCC Instagram were methods viewed by the respondents as the most effective means by which the awareness of FCC can be expanded.

Figure 4. A figure to show platforms/methods which executive/volunteer survey respondents believe should be used to expand awareness of the service.



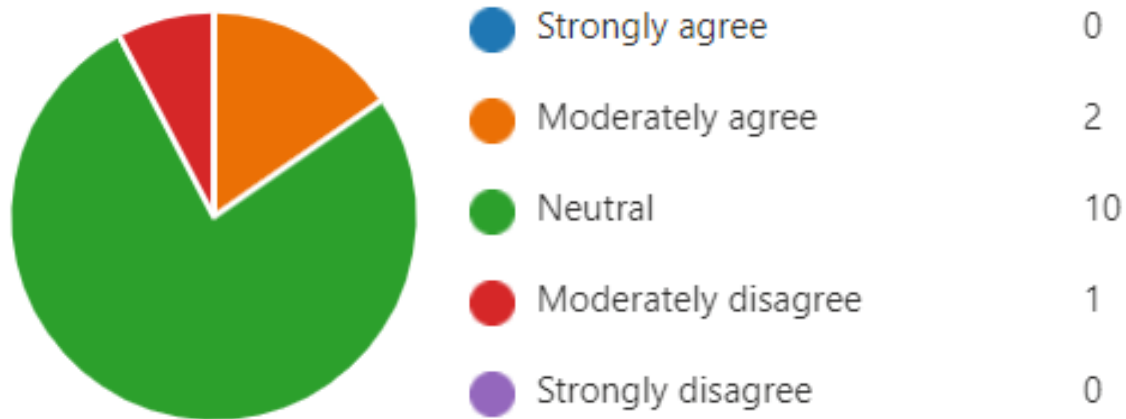
Communication between FCC and both the Marketing & Communications Department and the Underground was viewed as being quite efficient, though opportunities for improvement in regards to communication with the Underground do exist. Similarly, communication between FCC and MSU Administration has space for improvement as it was simply viewed as being adequate. Job descriptions were also seen as being appropriate to expected task and work. Similarly, the workload expected of individuals did not impede on other responsibilities had by respondents and was viewed as very manageable. The hiring process was viewed as being fair and legitimate by the vast majority of respondents as well.

Executives and volunteers felt the Good Food Box generally had diverse, culturally-specific food items, fresh, high quality, nutritious food, and were easy and straight forward to produce. Regarding the Lockers of Love, executives and volunteers felt anonymity was consistently maintained and delivery of services to students was straightforward. The educational quality, cultural diversity, and environment during Cooking Workshops was also viewed positively by executives and volunteers. Finally, regarding the Cultivating Change webinars, the educational content, production quality, and the presence of an open, welcoming environment were all viewed as being strong and consistently present. Overall, this shows that that akin to the general student body, the programming offered by FCC is also viewed as being appropriate, useful, and of high quality by those within the service who create them. In relation to how content is delivered, volunteers and executives expressed significantly greater interest in more in-person events and programming.

In addition, volunteers expressed that they generally felt comfortable during trainings, during sessions, and during other events. They felt that they were also able to reach out to executives in the case of concerns or questions, and to receive other support during programs, before and after programs, during trainings, and during other events. Volunteers and executives also displayed strong trust in their fellow service members during events, and expressed positive sentiments regarding comfort, ease of collaboration, and success in event planning.

Furthermore, events such as trainings, competencies, and group events were generally viewed as being very appropriate, effective, and useful. Trainings were viewed consistently as being positive, useful tools that ensured successful delivery of service materials and consistently had welcoming environments. However, this sentiment did not apply to the utility of re-trainings, for which there was a neutral opinion regarding their usefulness. Regarding team building exercises, it is important to note that while about 1/3 of respondents felt the current arrangement was appropriate, a similar proportion felt that there were insufficient events, and the remainder (also about 1/3) felt there were excessive events. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion trainings were also viewed as highly competent, with few areas for improvement in the views of respondents. Overall, the workload expected of respondents based on the job descriptions was viewed as being appropriate, rarely impeding the ability of those within the FCC team from achieving their other academic and extracurricular goals.

Figure 5. A figure to show executive/volunteer sentiment regarding the utility of re-trainings. Responses were given to the following question: “Re-trainings were helpful to my success in FCC this year.”



EXTERNAL RESEARCH

As a part of the external research strategy, Services Committee embarked on a research planning aimed to review all undergraduate student unions of universities in Ontario. While this goal was not met, in total, detailed information of relevant structures at other institutions was collected from more than 10 Ontario universities. This has helped shed light on the interesting and unique arrangements which exist at other educational institutions, and important areas in which the MSU can potentially improve delivery of programming by FCC. Unlike some of the other services reviewed, services similar to FCC were also far more prevalent at other student unions.

Brock University community offers a program called Food First, aimed at supporting students who are facing food insecurity. This service, while prominently displayed on the student union website, appears to be managed more centrally by Brock University itself. In addition to methods by which individuals can receive locally sourced produce, it also offers online recipe links via the [r/EatCheapandHealthy](#) subreddit and links to community food insecurity resources. In addition, there are links to Flipp and Flashfoods, apps which can be used to collate information from fliers about discounts at local grocers.

When looking at the Carleton University Community, we see that the Carleton University Student Association has a service called the United Support Centre, within which a Food Centre is included. This sub-service provides on-campus food support and advocacy services. They hold food preparation events and increase awareness of food insecurity and poverty in the Ottawa-Gatineau community. They also offer an Emergency Essentials Assistance Program which provides food hampers to students in need (pickup and delivery). Students are limited to 2 hampers per month. While specifics of the size and content of the hampers is limited, they appear to be widely similar to what is offered by FCC through the Lockers of Love program.

The Alma Mater Society, the undergraduate student union of Queen’s University offers a Food Bank service which can give food insecure individuals access to food items free of charge in a confidential manner. They also appear to do some additional advocacy regarding food insecurity, though information is limited. It is important to note however that the fee for the Food Bank comes from a student fee from which students can opt-out.

The student unions at the University of Ottawa, University of Guelph, St. George Campus of the University of Toronto, University of Western Ontario, Wilfred Laurier University, and the University of Waterloo all have similar services to the MSU with various unique attributes. All offer confidential, free access to food for those in need. Some, such as the University of Windsor have specific limits to the number of times individuals can access food (4 times per month for food, once for hygiene products). The University of Ottawa Student Union has direct collaborations with local foodbanks, while the Scarborough Campus of U of T works with FoodShare Toronto to deliver food items to those in need. The St. George Campus of U of T requires students to formally register as being food insecure to receive necessary items. The undergraduate student unions of U of T also take a strong advocacy approach, in a manner similar to FCC. The same applies to the equivalent service at the University of Western Ontario, which takes a sharp focus on advocacy initiatives in addition to on-the-ground support for students.

In summary, we see that the services offered by FCC are in many ways similar to what is offered at other southern Ontario undergraduate student unions. Nonetheless, FCC is still one of the leaders, as it takes a strong advocacy focus and

aims to inform students with advocacy events, cooking workshops, webinars, and other tools that are relatively uncommon or undeveloped at other institutions. Nonetheless, a few areas of improvement do exist and should be pursued.

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered through surveying of the student body and volunteers + executives of FCC, it is evident that FCC makes up a very important aspect of the McMaster community. Its services are a vital resource to students, and it is an important factor in ensuring emergency food and wellness resources are readily accessible. While FCC excels in the vast majority of metrics, this review has unveiled a few areas in which FCC service delivery can be improved to ensure it continues to represent a high standard of care.

Firstly, there should be continued strong usage of Instagram due to its near ubiquity amongst the student body. Simultaneously, there should be a strong focus on potentially adding TikTok as a new platform as it was strongly expressed by the student body as an area in which FCC should have a presence. This should go hand in hand with the second and third recommendation, which is to have an increase in combined events/initiatives with both McMaster and MSU services and student groups. While FCC already engages significantly with McMaster, student, and Hamilton community groups, further expansion of collaborations appears to be desired by the student body and should be invested in.

Furthermore, while the online option for the Lockers of Love Program should be maintained. This is not only as a fall-back measure in the case in-person programming is no longer possible, but also because it serves as a unique option which is in fact preferred by most general student body survey respondents.

The Community Kitchen Workshops should be transitioned back to an in-person model as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, as this is the preference of both the student body as well as FCC executives + volunteers. The in-person model is generally seen as more communicative and engaging, the likely reason for this preference. Nonetheless, a method by which these workshops can still be accessed via online platforms should be maintained.

Finally, FCC's socially media presence and online communications have been very good in the past academic year. One small recommendation is that FCC should ensure online events such as webinars, cooking workshops, or other initiatives are recorded and made available via social media platforms in the long-term. This can go hand-in-hand with initiatives such as posting of recipes or useful tips on social media, as this is a tool used by similar student groups at other Ontario undergraduate student unions.

With these steps in place, FCC will be able to successfully improve its service delivery and continue its role as a vital part of the McMaster Community. I would like to thank the Services Committee, Administrative Services Coordinator, Director of Marketing and Communications, the Director of FCC, Assistant Director of FCC, everyone else on the FCC Team who helped, and those in the student body who responded to the surveys for their help in the creation of this report.

Recommendations

1. Keep continued focus on Instagram as main means of social media promotion, with the addition of TikTok as a potential secondary focus.
2. Have increased collaboration and a greater number of combined events/initiatives with both McMaster and other MSU services.
3. Have increased collaborations with student clubs and other student groups in the realm of food insecurity. This can occur in information campaigns, webinars, discussions, via donations, or other means.
4. Maintain the option of online delivery of the Lockers of Love Program that began during the pandemic, so to ensure that online access methods are maintained if in-person is not possible.
5. Return to in-person delivery of the Community Kitchen Workshops as the main method of program delivery.
6. Greater online accessibility of FCC programming, such as social media posts regarding recipes, webinars, cooking workshops, and any other initiatives

Best regards,

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