

Annual Report

2023-2024



Our mission is to change the way children, youth, families and the greater community learn about and develop healthy relationships with food!



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Letter from the Executive Director

Hello Everyone,

A few months ago, I found myself both thinking about ways to share my thoughts on everything we've accomplished over the past year, and also reflecting on a typical, busy day. Eventually, I concluded that the best way to share with you the breadth of our work may be to provide a glimpse of a *Day in the life at Growing Chefs! Ontario!*

Today I walked into Growing Chefs! Headquarters just after 8:00 am.

Shortly after my arrival, the Garden team arrived and packed up to head to our Learning Gardens at The Western Fair Agriplex to meet a group of volunteers - today they are harvesting and packing food boxes. Tomorrow the food boxes will be delivered to families in the area who will receive fresh seasonal food, grown in our own gardens. It's incredible to think that earlier this week the same gardens were hosting school groups on a field trip and our parent & toddler garden exploration programming. Now, the same garden space will provide meaningful nourishment to families in need. WOW!

Shortly after 9:00 am the Education team welcomed a class of nearly 30 students for the last field trip of the school year at the Grove. "This is the best field trip I've ever brought a class to in my entire career!" said one of the teachers and was appreciative that their class could participate at no cost, thanks to our subsidy fund. The Education team is a well oiled machine; they are so good at what they do and it shows in their passion and the experiences they create for our participants every day!

All the while at the Grove, a seriously impressive "business as usual" attitude is in the air as the Beet Chefs (who have been at work since 6:30 am) are preparing over 400 (some days are up to 700!) delicious meals by 10:30 am. Just after lunch they will shift gears and begin preparing food for an 80 person catering for one of our community partners, which is being picked up in a few short hours.

Around Noon, the Events team arrived at HQ and the entire crew set up for one of our popular Monthly Adult Cooking Classes. Tonight, 24 guests will be guided through creating several “Garden Party” themed recipes by our Chef team. As I am taking in the beautiful fresh grown flower arrangements, which have just been harvested from our pollinator gardens, I realize I am standing in the way of a quick team meeting. The team is getting “a jump” on coordinating tomorrow’s “considerably busier” schedule.

By the way, did you know that Growing Chefs! does floral arrangements throughout the summer months!?

This was a banner year for Growing Chefs! Ontario! When you take a step back and look at everything accomplished over the past year with our small, but mighty, team - I find myself truly astonished. I am excited to share this report with you - it contains a breakdown of each department, but here are some highlights:

- Over **12,000 participants** through our Education programs
- Delivered **520 food boxes** to food insecure families in London
- Our Social Enterprise (through our Events and the Beet Hot Lunch Program) reached just over **\$900,000** in revenue
- **15,000+** online resource views and downloads of lesson plans and parent and teacher resources

Thank you for following me through a *Day in the life at Growing Chefs! Ontario!* I am immensely proud of the team and the work we’ve been doing in London and the surrounding community for over 16 years. The 2023-2024 Annual Report is meant to give you a glimpse into what we’ve accomplished last year, as we put the support you’ve given us to work. Thank you for coming with us on this past year’s journey and into the future. Each contribution from our community directly invests in children and families as they develop food literacy skills that will last a lifetime!



Andrew Fleet
Executive Director & Co-Founder



Food Education Programs

It was our largest year to date!

From working in classrooms to learning kitchens, greenhouses to gardens, community events to community centres - we were everywhere **AND** we still couldn't even keep up with all the requests for programming!





PARTNERS IN FOOD & AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

423 Food Education Programs

85 School and Community Partners

12,326 Food Education Participants from

5,682 School Programs

5,220 Community Programs

1,424 Public Programs

10,192 students participating in our Cultural Diversity Snack Project with the Ontario Student Nutrition Program

15,246 online resource views and downloads



“My son loved your camp. Said it was his favourite of all his summer day camps this year. He loved learning about recipes, preparing the ingredients, making food and, of course, eating it all! He’s definitely caught the cooking bug. Thank you.”

**- Melanie R.,
KYR Program Participant**



“My son loved potato harvesting, planting his own bean bush and the sensory play. The program leaders were kind and thoughtful and really engaging with all the children. This was a really great learning experience for my child and goes hand in hand with everything we are teaching him about caring for the environment. The garden is beautiful and so well kept!”

**- Mindy B.,
KYR Program Participant**



New Program: Kindergarten Kitchen



This year, we introduced a new program under our Food Education umbrella called **Kindergarten Kitchen**. Geared at our youngest participants, this program teaches students about the food system by exploring food waste in a new and unique way!



Since launching the pilot in January, **over 50+ classes** have participated in Kindergarten Kitchen and many more have joined the waitlist for the 2024 - 2025 school year.

We are excited to use this pilot project to expand our Food Education programs to schools in London and the surrounding area!



Check out the compilation of recent [Impact Reports](#) for more photos, testimonials and stories showcasing the impactful work we do!





Garden Programs

Our Garden Programs fall under our Food Education umbrella. While the food grown in our gardens teach children and youth about the local food system, almost everything we produce in the gardens are put into food boxes that are delivered to families who are food insecure, through our partnership with O.S.N.P..



4050 lbs of food harvested
from learning
gardens/greenhouses

\$21,975 value of food

520 food boxes delivered



London

LICIOUS

The Londonlicious Festival supports us in realizing our vision of a healthy community that is engaged with our food system! All sponsors of the bi-annual festival also support our children's education projects.

Check out the [Londonlicious Impact Report](#) for more details and the economic drive of the festival.

Winter Festival Metrics January 19 - February 11 2024



41 Participating Restaurants

Estimated Participants

10k+

\$65 Per Person Average Spend

\$650k

Estimated revenue brought into our local economy



Thank you to our festival sponsors!



For more information on the new
Londonlicious Festival visit www.londonlicious.ca

Social Enterprise

Over the past year, we have increased the capacity of our Social Enterprise which includes our **Events & Catering** portfolio and **The Beet Hot Lunch Program!**

Our Social Enterprise acts as the financial backbone of the organization and is the foundation on which our Food Education Programs operate.

This year we generated over \$900,000 in Social Enterprise revenue!



Events & Catering

Our events and catering portfolio allow patrons to simultaneously support a small, local charity, while also contributing to food education in our community: **one price, twice the impact.**

From weddings, private events and offsite caterings, to our popular Monthly Adult Cooking Classes - we've had a busy year!

153 Unique Events

Over 3,600 Event Attendees



The Beet Kitchen: Hot Lunch Program

It was an exciting year for the Beet Kitchen! Partnering with schools and camps across the region, this program enables children to eat healthy lunches while providing us with the revenue required to teach more children about food literacy and food preparation through our core programs.



This year we partnered with **7 schools, child-care centres & community organizations**, delivering meals to **16 different locations** across the city daily.



That's approximately **90,000** hot lunches over the course of the year!

Here are some photo examples of our menu options from the past year!



"Katana Kafe was AMAZING for dinner. Watching flights land and take off was an added bonus to a wonderful dinner, started by dill pickle soup which was terrific!!! The server encouraged us to try it and she was completely right - loved it. Dinner followed and was excellent as usual."

- Karen M., Londonlicious Participant



"I love these classes and promote them to friends any time I can. The staff and environment are always welcoming, making learning new recipes easy."

- Tracy F., MACC Participant



"I absolutely LOVED your event last weekend. I'm still bragging to anyone who will listen to me about that incredible dinner and experience. It's tremendous to see Growing Chefs! Ontario doing such amazing work in our community."

- Natalie W., Event Attendee

Special Event: Global Gastronomy



as seen on

NETFLIX

On June 1st, in partnership with The Grove and the Middlesex London Food Policy Council, Growing Chefs! Ontario hosted a Master Class and Gourmet Dinner with **Rodrigo Pacheco, Ecuadorian Chef and UN GoodWill Ambassador for Food and Agriculture.**



Rodrigo Pacheco is the founder of Bocavaldivia research and development restaurant, located in Puerto Cayo, Manabí and founder of Foresta restaurant located in Quito, capital of Ecuador. His vision, career and purpose, plus his extraordinary participation in the gastronomic competition “The Final Table” produced by Netflix, have been well recognized by the world press and international organizations.



The Master Class was hosted entirely in our learning garden, inspiring participants to better understand the connections between cooking and nature. Participants had one-on-one time with Chef Pacheco, in an intimate class atmosphere. Learning valuable skills and techniques, making incredible food and recipes – making the experience unforgettable.



Middlesex London
Food Policy Council



GROWING Chefs!



the grove.
HARVESTING INNOVATION

A special thank you to
Fanshawe and The Chef's
Table for welcoming us into
their space for the
Gourmet Dinner!



Later in the afternoon, the Gourmet Dinner boasted a one of a kind culinary experience! The event was attended by notable guests from 3 levels of government, representatives from prominent local businesses, real estate developers, non-profits and community leaders alike. Led by Chef Rodrigo, the Growing Chefs! team and the exceptional support from Fanshawe College's culinary instructors and students, the 3 course meal delivered an unforgettable experience for everyone.

Rodrigo Pacheco has attracted the attention of the world through his culinary art and innovative project "The largest Biodiverse Edible Forest in the world." We are extremely passionate about helping London join his global community of connectors and food system change makers.



Thank you to our Global Gastronomy sponsors!

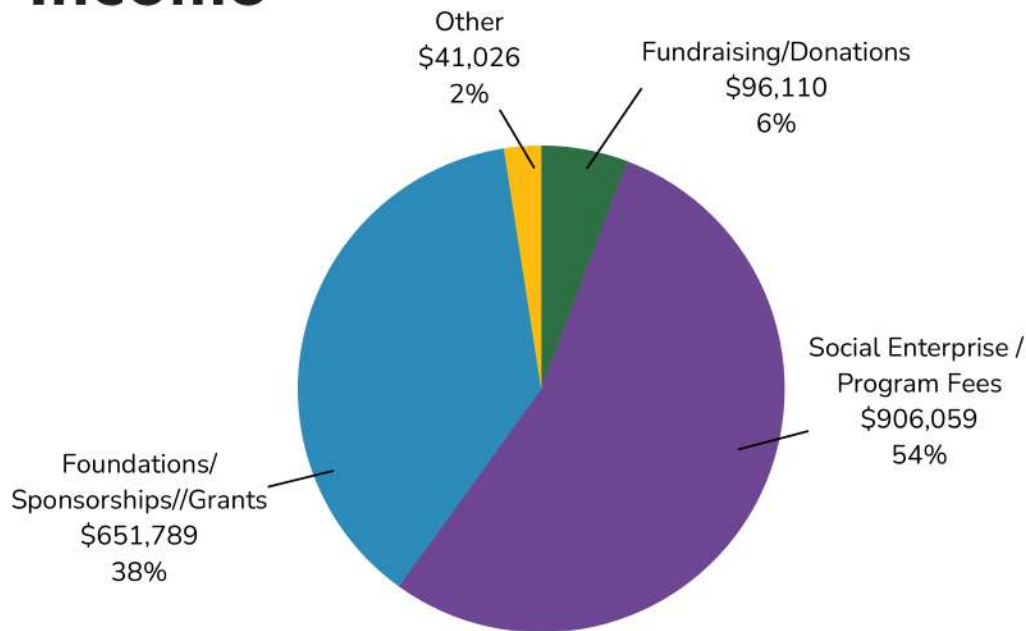


*The Brian and Heather
Semkowski Foundation*



2023-2024 Audited Financials

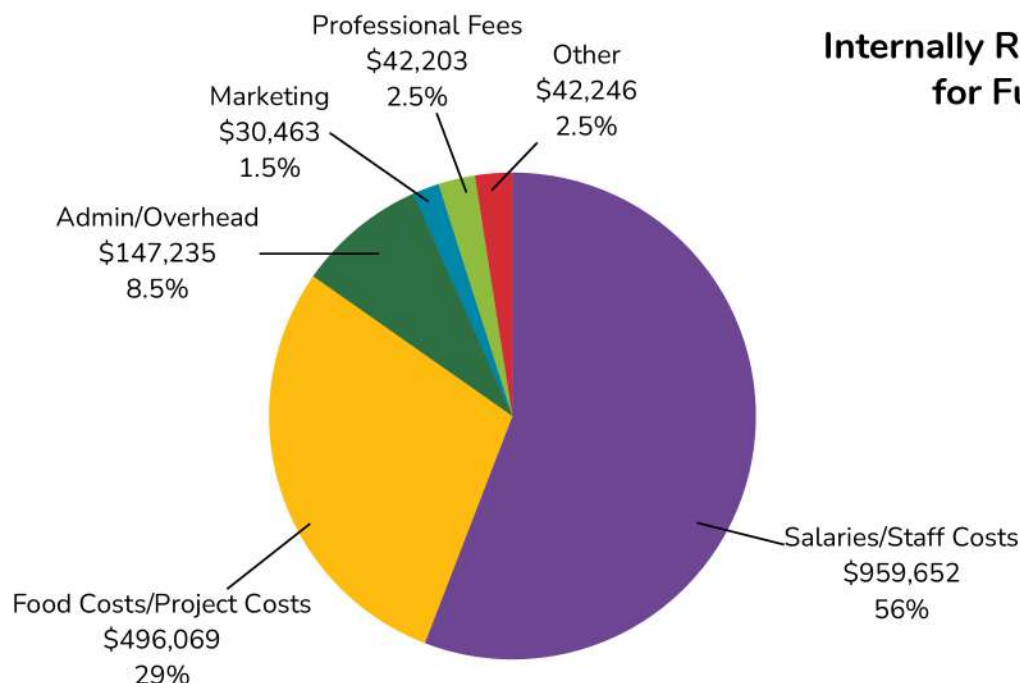
Income



Total Revenue
\$1,694,894

Total Expenditures
\$1,717,868

Expenses



Total Revenue over Expenses
\$-22,884

**Internally Restricted Income
for Future Operations**
\$ 52,406

The 2023-2024 School Food Education Project is presented by our Title Sponsor:



With the generosity of the following Corporate Sponsors
and Community Partners:



Colborne Street United Church
Local Outreach Committee



**We are fortunate to have the generous support of Grants,
Individual Donors and Private Foundations \$10,000 +:**



Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario



Peter & Catherine Clark Family Foundation

The Peter Gilgan Foundation

*The Brian and Heather
Semkowski Foundation*

The Smibert Family

*Cambia Development
Foundation*

*Lynn Davis and The Verna D.
Davis Family Foundation*

*Brenda and Dave Savel
Foundation*

*Richard and Shelley Baker
Family Foundation*

Estate of Jeanne Olliver

**We are fortunate to have the generous support of Grants,
Individual Donors and Private Foundations \$500 - \$9,999:**

Auberge du Petit Prince Inc.

Ian Smith & Janet Fleet

ROOTS Community Fund

Nigel and Rhonda Gilby Foundation

The Gate Key Foundation

Christine Scheer & John Wilson

*Nature London Community
Eco-Grants Program*

Heather Manness

Les Siemieniuk & Jackie Bell

Dara Lambe

Justin Pilon & Sarah Emms-Pilon

Brian & Sharon Lessard

Natasha Roberts

Vincent Chicoine

Enterprise Mobility Foundation

Carolyn Luistro

Mortgage Wise Financial

We are fortunate to have received generous support through:



We are proud of our in-kind supporters:



Our Growing Team

Thank you to all of our amazing staff, Board members and volunteers for all of your tireless work this year. None of this would have been possible without you!

Staff

Katie Bettinger
Laine Barnfield
Christy Cook
William Cowan
Paige Downey
Rian Fennell
Andrew Fleet
Jordan Grecia
Ilana Guslits
Lauren Ibbott
Michael Isase
Mike Johnston
Katherine Jones
Camryn Latif
Meredith Lewkowitz

Meredith Lewkowitz
Maria Lierman
Sophia Martella
Leila McBeth
Emily McDonald
Natalio Meijia
Justin O'Reilly
Matt Rice
Sidney Robertson
Miguel Rodas
Matt Rylett
Ashley Ungar
Juliana Van Osch
Jen Wyant



Our Volunteers

This year we welcomed 55 volunteers who contributed a whopping 668 hours towards our programs and events! Please contact lauren@growingchefsontario.ca if you'd like to start, or restart, volunteering!

Letter from the Board Chair



Jordan Hypes
Board Chair

“On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am thrilled to share that this past year has been one of incredible progress for Growing Chefs! The lessons learned and work put in over the past few years has allowed us to thrive and provided the momentum to shape a new strategic plan to ensure we continue building a healthy, empowered community. We are proud of all the Growing Chefs! programming this year, including the Londonlicious festival and amazing Global Gastronomy event. These accomplishments are only possible through the fantastic partnerships built over the past 15+ years and the generous support of our community. As we continue growing, we invite you to keep supporting Growing Chefs! through volunteering or financial contributions. I couldn’t be more excited for what lies ahead.”

2023 - 2024 Board Members

Jordan Hypes: 2016 - Present (Board Chair)

Mary Hajpel: 2021 - Present (Treasurer)

Michael Clark: 2022 - Present (Secretary)

Andrew Wolwowicz: 2010 - Present

Malcolm Scott: 2012 - Present

Cecile Klerks-Janssen: 2018 - Present

Caitlin Fisher: 2023 - Present

Nicholas Cardelli: 2023 - Present

Josh Fentin: 2023 - Present



HELP US **GROW!**

Research shows that food literacy and cooking-based education:

- Improves academic performance, especially in STEM subjects
- Improves attitudes towards learning
- Improves sense of community connection and belonging

For over 16 years we have been creating and providing impactful, hands-on cooking and food literacy programming for families and schools in our community and beyond, regardless of financial or social barriers.

Please join us in providing food education to children, youth and families in London and surrounding areas. We are a leading voice in food education but we need your support to reach another 10,000+ children this year.

Check out our [2024-2025 Case for Support](#) to discover our funding priorities for the upcoming year.

Maximize the impact of your support by including a gift in your will. After taking care of your family and loved ones, remember Growing Chefs! Ontario by supporting children and youth to provide food education for generations to come.





Our vision is to build and maintain a healthy, empowered community that is engaged with our food system.

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